

AMERICAN LITERATURE AS OPERA

BY

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For Sondra, Stephanie, and Kathleen

"Every high C accurately struck demolishes the  
theory that we are the irresponsible puppets  
of fate or chance."

W. H. Auden

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Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

AMERICAN LITERATURE AS OPERA

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Major Department: English

American literature as source material for operatic librettos has attracted librettists since 1855, when J. H. Wainwright adapted Washington Irving's "Rip Van Winkle." Other nineteenth-century American authors whose settings, characters, and plots have inspired numerous English language librettos include: Hawthorne, Melville, Cable, Hale, Longfellow, Twain, and Henry James. Setting, characterization, and plot, all greatly simplified in the adaptive process, provide a common ground for the comparison of the original fictional source and the adapted libretto.

The functions of setting in librettos parallel those of setting in fiction: 1.) to localize action and character, 2.) to reinforce some mood or emotion of a character, and 3.) to symbolize important associations. The fictional methods of presenting these three elements, however, differ from those used in opera. In fiction, description, dialogue, and the interior monologue of a character can present setting. In opera, stage scenery and dramatic presentation establish the setting. Often, special stage effects used in conjunction with the lyrics of the libretto create symbolic associations in the setting.

In characterization, both fiction and opera present the observable and the hidden characteristics of individuals. Actions, personal objects, and clothing characterize observable traits in both fiction and opera. The interior monologue in fiction directly reveals the inner nature of the character to the reader. The aria in opera, like the dramatic soliloquy in drama, also reveals the inner thoughts and emotions of a character. In opera, the additional resource of music offers a device for characterization unavailable to the novelist or the short story writer.

Operatic plots, in spite of the seeming diversity among them, have a universal structure and a basic content. Created to accommodate both dramatic continuity and musical development, this operatic structure alternates dynamic moments of dramatic action with static periods of lyric introspection. Disguised by various approaches to opera, e.g. the "continuous opera" of the nineteenth century and the "recitative opera" of the twentieth century, this structure is inherent in operatic dramaturgy. A strong emotional content has traditionally provided the motivation and the dramatic interest in operatic plots.

The adaptation of the works of the various American authors mentioned above has produced a paradox. In adapting any literary source, the librettist is confronted with the necessity of simplifying the original material. The simple, straightforward narratives of Irving and Hale and the limited number of characters and settings in Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter appear to offer promising materials

for adaptation. However, these works have not resulted in successful operatic librettos. By contrast, the complex, but highly dramatic, forms of Melville and James and the numerous settings in a novel like The Wings of the Dove have provided materials compatible with the simple, emotionally charged nature of opera.

## INTRODUCTION

In the 1580's, the Florentine camerata, a group of Italian composers, scholars, and cultivated amateurs of art, met regularly to plan a revival of ancient Greek drama. The camerata knew that both Greek comedy and tragedy had been musical productions,<sup>1</sup> although they had no access to the nature of the music. Their attempts to recreate Greek drama by combining dramatic action with musical declamation<sup>2</sup> produced the first works of a new art form, opera.

Striving to create new dramas as accurately as possible according to their understanding of the Greek model, the librettists of these early operas based their plots on mythology. Such titles as Peri's Dafne (1597), Caccini's Euridice (1600), and Monteverdi's Orfeo (1607) are representative of a number of early Italian music dramas based on mythological sources. Francesco Algarotti, one of the most influential writers on opera, defended mythology as one of the best possible subjects for operatic treatment. Mythological subjects provided two advantages: motivation for elaborate stage effects through machinery and elevation of everything above the human level, making "the singing seem to be the natural language of the character."<sup>3</sup> The treatment of mythological materials reached its greatest heights in the psychological music dramas of Richard Wagner in the nineteenth century. Patrick Smith, in The Tenth Muse: A Historical Study of the Opera Libretto, writes that Wagner's achievement in adapting the Nordic myths for the operatic stage "freed the libretto of its dependency upon the immediate and consequently

opened up the world of what has come to be called the subconscious."<sup>4</sup> Wagner's dramatization of man's inner nature is developed in Tristan und Isolde, which with a minimum of physical action achieves its greatest impact through emotional and psychological suggestion.

Literature has provided another rich source for the librettist. Plots for many operas have been adapted from works of such authors as Shakespeare, Beaumarchais, Dumas, Prosper Mérimée, Goethe, Hawthorne, Melville, Henry James, and Steinbeck. From among this great variety of subjects, the librettist must decide what is suitable for operatic adaptation. Christoph Martin Wieland, author of the Romantic epic Oberon and a contemporary of Algarotti, sought a "beautiful simplicity" in both the presentation of plot and the depiction of character. Plot incidents should be restricted in number, and characters should be presented "more in view of their feelings and emotions than with regard to their external actions."<sup>5</sup> These criteria of simplicity have been expressed in various ways by other writers and have retained their validity. The subtleties of Shakespeare's Hamlet may have defied the simplification necessary for successful operatic treatment, but such unlikely materials as Henry James's The Wings of the Dove, a novel of great breadth and complexity, and Anton Chekov's The Sea Gull, a drama of psychological and philosophical subtleties, have both been successfully adapted for the operatic stage."<sup>6</sup>

On September 27, 1855, George Frederick Bristow's opera Rip Van Winkle was produced at Niblo's Garden in New York City. With a libretto by J. H. Wainwright, this was the first opera adapted from a work of American fiction. American literature has continued to attract

operatic librettists and composers. Earle H. Johnson in his extensive examination of operas based on American subjects writes that the American experience in general "has preyed on the minds of many whose earnestness has not been marked by a commensurate talent."<sup>7</sup> Johnson lists fifty-five operas both in English and in foreign languages, whose stories have been based on literary works by American authors. However, Johnson's list is not exhaustive. Four operas composed prior to 1964 but omitted from Johnson's list and six operas composed after 1964 may now be added to update his list.<sup>8</sup>

I have narrowed my consideration of librettos from these lists to those 1.) based on nineteenth-century American literature and 2.) written in English. A thorough canvass has turned up sixteen librettos which meet these criteria. These librettos span the time period from 1855 to 1976 when Washington Square, the most recent opera libretto based on an American literary source, was written and performed. In this list, the librettists' names appear first and the composers' names appear in parentheses. Copyright dates of the operas are in parentheses; other dates are for first performances, except as indicated.

George Washington Cable

C. F. Keary  
revised by Douglas Craig  
and Andrew Page  
(Frederick Delius)

Koanga (The Grandissimes)  
(1935, rev. 1974)

Edward Everett Hale

Arthur Guiterman  
(Walter Damrosch)

The Man Without a Country  
(1937)

## Nathaniel Hawthorne

Charles F. Carlson  
 (composer-librettist)  
 George Parsons Lathrop  
 (Walter Damrosch)  
 Richard Stokes  
 (Howard Hanson)

Hester; or, The Scarlet Letter  
 (n.d.)  
 The Scarlet Letter  
 1896  
 Merry Mount (The Maypole of  
 Merry Mount) (1933)

## Washington Irving

J. H. Wainwright  
 (George Frederick Bristow)  
 Percy Mackaye  
 (Reginald De Koven)  
 Stephen Vincent Benét  
 (Douglas Moore)

Rip Van Winkle  
 (1855)  
 Rip Van Winkle  
 (1919)  
 The Headless Horseman; or The  
 Legend of Sleepy Hollow  
 (1937)

## Henry James

Myfanwy Piper  
 (Benjamin Britten)  
 Ethan Ayer  
 (Douglas Moore)  
 Kenward Elmslie  
 (Thomas Pasatieri)

The Turn of the Screw  
 (1955)  
 Owen Wingrave  
 (1971)  
 The Wings of the Dove  
 (1961)  
 Washington Square  
 (1976)

## Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Charles F. Carlson  
 (composer-librettist)

The Courtship of Miles  
 Standish (n.d.)

## Herman Melville

E. M. Forster and Eric Crozier  
 (Benjamin Britten)  
 Ernst Krenek  
 (composer-librettist)

Billy Budd  
 (1951, rev. 1961)  
 The Bell Tower  
 composed 1955-56

## Mark Twain

Jean Karsavina  
 (Lucas Foss)

The Jumping Frog of Calaveras  
 County (1951)

While opera as an artistic form has been studied for centuries,  
 limited discussion in one or two chapters of a book or in an article has



been devoted to the libretto. The most complete study of the opera libretto to date is The Tenth Muse: A Historical Study of the Opera Libretto by Patrick Smith, who attempts to establish the libretto as a separate literary genre. Joseph Kerman in Opera as Drama suggests that the true dramatist in an opera is not the librettist but the composer, through whose music the drama inherent in the libretto is clarified and refined.<sup>9</sup> In a recent book The Magic of Opera, J. Merrill Knapp writes that opera has two dramatists: the librettist and the composer. Both have defined responsibilities, each completing tasks necessary to the creation of an opera.

Throughout the history of opera, the relative merits of the libretto and of the music have been debated. Composers and librettists have advocated various approaches to the creation of opera. While historical categories reduce the complexities of these various artistic positions, the development of opera has suggested three basic approaches to its creation. The neoclassic theory of opera stresses the dominance of the libretto over music. Beginning with the camerata, this approach predominated throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, finding support in writers from Corneille to Rousseau and the Encyclopedists. Christoph Gluck "sought to restrict music to its true function, namely to serve the poetry by means of the expression."<sup>10</sup> The neoclassic theory found philosophical support in the writings of Immanuel Kant for whom reason is the supreme guide in human affairs and "who . . . finds fault with music on account of its sensuousness" (Weinstein, "Introduction," in The Essence of Opera, p. 6).

The Romantic theory of opera, which emerged in the late eighteenth century and flourished in the first half of the nineteenth century, celebrated music over the word. Mozart, "a born melodramaturgist," believed "poetry must be the obedient daughter of music."<sup>11</sup> Stendhal carried this position to the extreme in advocacy of dispensing, or nearly so, with the libretto: "Words are fundamentally unimportant in relation to music."<sup>12</sup> George Bernard Shaw believed the words in opera could be reduced to "roulade vocalization" or eliminated completely since feeling "is the real subject of the drama."<sup>13</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, who ranked music as the highest of the arts, bestows his greatest praise on the music of Rossini, which achieves its full "effect when rendered by instruments alone."<sup>14</sup>

Through his operatic reforms, Richard Wagner sought to unify these two diverse approaches. The dramatic content and the musical form should be mutually complementary. In a Gesamtkunstwerk "the content must, accordingly, be closely linked to the expression, while the expression must continuously evoke the content in its full scope. For that which is not present to the senses is grasped by thoughts alone, while feeling comprehends only that which is brought before it."<sup>15</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, in his youth an admirer of Wagner, found the near-perfect fusion of music and drama in Tristan und Isolde and thought Wagner the only artist capable of giving rebirth to Greek tragedy. The mythic (Dionysian) realm and the human (Apollonian) word presented in tragedy are unified in Wagner's music drama. The universal authority of music produces in the hearer "the illusion that music is only the most effective means for the animation of the plastic world of myth."<sup>16</sup>

In the drama, we see Tristan and Isolde as passionate lovers: "Thus does the Appollonian wrest us from the Dionysian universality and fill us with rapture for individuals; to these it rivets our sympathetic emotion" (Nietzsche, p. 229). Through the union of these two principles, the universal, intellectual nature of myth and a detached, emotional picture of human experience complement each other. The universal language of "music is essentially the representative art for an Appollonian substance" (Nietzsche, p. 230).

From opera's inception, the relationship between the dramatic and the musical demands of opera has presented the basic problem of operatic dramaturgy. How to advance the dramatic situation and, at the same time, to allow complete musical development have been the perennial questions of librettists and composers. The structures which accommodate both of these requirements are the traditional operatic forms of recitative and aria. The recitative advances the dramatic action, and the aria provides lyric expression. In his book Opera, Charles Hamm suggests these basic operatic techniques underlie all the various forms of opera: the number operas of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, e.g. Cimarosa's Il Matrimonio Segreto and Donizetti's Lucia di Lammermoor; the nineteenth century's contribution of the continuous opera, e.g. Wagner's Der Ring des Nibelungen and Verdi's Otello; and the modern recitative opera, e.g. Britten's The Turn of the Screw and Krenek's The Bell Tower.

Because of the fundamental importance of the structure of libretto to the overall success of an opera, the librettist must be considered a dramatist, "an artist . . . who can often visualize the work as a whole more effectively than the composer (Smith, p. xix); in short, a creator of setting, character, and plot. These three

storytelling devices are also used by writers of narrative fiction; however, the techniques used in librettos differ from those used in fiction to present these three techniques. In fiction, setting is often conveyed through passages of description. These can be large blocks of objective description as in the opening paragraphs of Irving's Rip Van Winkle or in Cable's picture of a Louisiana swamp in The Grandissimes. The setting in fiction can be refracted through the mind of a character, presenting a subjective picture of the setting colored by the character's prejudices, e.g. the numerous settings perceived through the characters in a Jamesian novel. But settings in an opera are presented pictorially through the stage settings or dramatically through words sung by a character or by the chorus. In opera, the setting can often suggest the psychological nature of a character with the assistance of stage machinery, e.g. the increasing distortion of the jungle scenery and the increasing terror of Brutus Jones in Louis Gruenberg's The Emperor Jones, based on the play by Eugene O'Neill.

The production of opera and the history of stage machinery have been closely related. In the development of stage machinery, opera played a more important part than did drama. Edward Dent writes that "all the inventions of stage engineers and architects of the seventeenth century were intended for opera."<sup>17</sup> The use and the development of new mechanical techniques in staging operas have continued throughout the history of opera. In the nineteenth century, Wagner made greater demands on the resources of the stage than any other operatic practitioner. The opening scene of Das Rheingold, to select from numerous examples, is set beneath the Rhine River. In the original

production, Rhinemaidens appeared to be swimming beneath the water. In reality they were women propelled about the stage in "swimming machines," flatbed carts each of which held an elongated basket-like affair on a pole. The women rested in the baskets and made swimming motions.<sup>18</sup>

Characterization complexities in opera are a luxury. By comparison with their literary counterparts, operatic characters are drawn with a simple directness, making their natures clear and immediately recognizable. In a novel, characterization is expansive and creates people "three-quarters hidden like an iceberg."<sup>19</sup> In their libretto Billy Budd, on the other hand, E. M. Forster and Eric Crozier draw Claggart's character in broad, clear strokes. Claggart sings an aria in which he directly reveals to the audience his evil nature. In Melville, Claggart cannot be so easily understood. The observable aspects of Claggart, his appearance and his actions, reveal nothing of substance. "But for the adequate comprehending of Claggart by a normal nature these hints are insufficient. To pass from a normal nature to him one must cross 'the deadly space between.' And this is best done by indirection."<sup>20</sup> E. M. Forster claims that "it is the function of the novelist to reveal the hidden life at its source . . . (Forster, p. 45). The novelist has the freedom to enter the minds of his characters at will, and the ability to present their thoughts directly through the interior monologue. In addition to the aria, the librettist can characterize through special actions which he indicates in the libretto and which are often synchronized with the music, e.g. the pantomime at the conclusion of Act II of Puccini's Tosca is specified through the detailed stage instructions which appear in the libretto. The nature of music, e.g. its rhythms, key

signatures, and themes can contribute to characterization. Stendhal's term "dramatic harmonization" anticipates Wagner's leitmotif and explains this one use of music as a tool of characterization: "It is the rarer art of using the instruments to voice nuances and overtones of emotion which the characters themselves would never dare put into words" (Stendhal, in The Essence of Opera, pp. 191-92).

In the finest librettos, plot centers around a single dramatic line. Boito's adaptation of Shakespeare's Othello eliminates all subsidiary characters and events to concentrate on the interaction of Othello, Iago, and Desdemona. Othello's increasing rage, Iago's treachery, and Desdemona's bewilderment and fear surrounding the mystery of the handkerchief propel the plot to its final tragedy. As Lehman Engel explains, "Because of the emotional weight of the music and the time it consumes in performance, there is generally no need to find an engaging complement for the basic plot."<sup>21</sup> The simplicity of structure in operatic plots is accompanied by a highly emotional content. Human passions, e.g. love and its accompanying emotions of jealousy and hatred, have been at the root of operatic plots from Peri's Euridice to Mozart's The Marriage of Figaro to Verdi's Otello to Elmslie's Washington Square.

This dissertation will analyze the adaptation of six novels, seven short stories, and one long narrative poem from nineteenth-century American literature into the respective opera librettos based on these narrative works. The three elements of the storyteller's art form a common ground for comparative analysis between the fictional source and

the new product, the opera libretto. The similarities between the settings, characters, and actions written for the relative scope and structural freedom of narrative fiction and those which are adapted to the structural confines of drama appear remotely related. However, the continuous use of fictional source material as the basis for operatic librettos does suggest a possible closer relationship. Indeed, Henry James, writing of the principle of scenario, expressed his belief that the two methods are similar. For James, the scenario was the "key that, working in the same general way, fits the complicated chambers of both the dramatic and the narrative lock. . . ." <sup>22</sup>

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Douglas Feaver, "Words and Music in Greek Drama," in The Essence of Opera, ed. Ulrich Weisstein (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1964), p. 10.

<sup>2</sup>Jacopo Peri, "Preface to Euridice," in The Essence of Opera, p. 20. "Whence, seeing that . . . I had to reproduce speech by song . . . I . . . used a kind of harmony which, going beyond ordinary speech, remained so far below the melody of song that it constituted an intermediate form."

<sup>3</sup>Francesco Algarotti, "Essay on Opera," in The Essence of Opera, p. 70.

<sup>4</sup>Patrick Smith, The Tenth Muse: A Historical Study of the Opera Libretto (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1970), p. 273.

<sup>5</sup>Christoph Martin Wieland, "Essay Concerning German Opera and a Few Related Subjects," in The Essence of Opera, p. 121.

<sup>6</sup>"All but the Score," Newsweek, 58 (October 23, 1961), 64. "To turn Henry James' rarified novel into robust theater takes some doing, but Ethan Ayer's libretto succeeds. The motives of Kate Croy and Merton Densher . . . as they scheme to fleece Milly Theale, the dying heiress, have had some of their Jamesian vapors fanned away so that they stand out in sharp focus."

Hubert Saal, "Chekov from the Heart," Newsweek, 83 (March 18, 1974), 5. In spite of the distortions and simplifications necessary in operatic dramaturgy, Pasatieri and his librettist, the American poet Kenward Elmslie, have turned "the opera into a splendid success." The librettist has brought "the subterranean Chekov to the surface."

<sup>7</sup>Earle H. Johnson, Operas on American Subjects (New York: Coleman-Ross, Inc., 1964), p. 5.

<sup>8</sup>Copyright dates appear in parentheses; other dates are for first performances, except as indicated.

Louisa May Alcott

Freer, Eleanor Everest

Little Women 1934

David Belasco

Puccini, Giacomo

The Girl of the Golden West (1910)

Stephen Vincent Benét

Moore, Douglas

The Devil and Daniel Webster (1943)



George Washington Cable

Delius, Frederick

Koanga (The Grandissimes) (1935, Rev. 1974)

James Fenimore Cooper

Adam, Adolphe  
Allen, Paul Hastings  
Arditi, Luigi  
Davis, A. J.  
Genée, Franz  
Halevy, Jacques  
Phelps, E. C.  
Planquette, Jean-Robert  
Villani, Angelo

Les Mohicans 1837  
The Last of the Mohicans 1916  
La Spia 1856  
The Last of the Mohicans n.d.  
Die Letzten Mohikaner 1878  
Jaguarita l'Indienne (The Spy) (1885)  
The Last of the Mohicans n.d.  
Surcouf (The Pilot) (1888)  
La Spia 1850

Edward Everett Hale

Damrosch, Walter

The Man Without a Country (1937)

Bret Harte

Floridaia, Pietro  
Weinberger, Jaromir

La Colonia libera (M'liss) (1900)  
Lide z Pokerflatu (The Outcasts of  
Poker Flat) (1932)

Nathaniel Hawthorne

Carlson, Charles F.  
Claflin, Avery  
Damrosch, Walter  
Floridaia, Pietro  
Giannini, Vittorio  
Hanson, Howard  
  
Kaufmann, Walter  
Southard, Lucien H.

Hester; or, The Scarlet Letter n.d.  
Hester Prynne 1934  
The Scarlet Letter 1896  
The Scarlet Letter composed 1908  
The Scarlet Letter 1938  
Merry Mount (The Maypole of Merry Mount)  
(1933)  
The Scarlet Letter 1961  
The Scarlet Letter 1855

Dorothy and Dubose Heyward

Gershwin, George

Porgy and Bess (1935)

Washington Irving

Briston, George F.  
De Koven, Reginald  
Jordan, Jules  
Leoni, Franco  
Manning, Edward  
Maretzek, Max

Rip Van Winkle (1855)  
Rip Van Winkle (1919)  
Rip Van Winkle (1897)  
Rip Van Winkle (1897)  
Rip Van Winkle 1932  
Sleepy Hollow; or The Headless Horseman  
1897

Moore, Douglas	The Headless Horseman; or, The Legend of Sleepy Hollow (1937)
Planquette, Jean-Robert	Rip Van Winkle (1882)
Henry James	
Britten Benjamin	The Turn of the Screw (1955)
Moore, Douglas	Owen Wingrave (1971)
Pasatieri, Thomas	The Wings of the Dove (1961)
	Washington Square (1976)
John Luther Long	
Puccini, Giacomo	Madama Butterfly (1904)
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow	
Carlson, Charles F.	The Courthsip of Miles Standish n.d.
Eames, Henry Purmort	Priscilla n.d.
Fanciulli, Francesco	Priscilla; or, The Maid of Plymouth 1901
Jones, Abbie Gerrish	Priscilla composed 1885-87
Leroux, Xavier	Evangeline (1895)
Luening, Otto	Evangeline 1948
Rice, Edward E.	Evangeline (1887)
Spelman, Timothy Mather	The Courship of Miles Standish composed 1943
Surette, Thomas Whitney	Priscilla; or, The Pilgrim's Proxy (1889)
Ware, Harriet	Priscilla n.d.
Herman Melville	
Aschaffenburg, Walter	Bartleby composed 1962
Britten, Benjamin	Billy Budd (1951, rev. 1961)
Ghedini, G. Federico	Billy Budd 1949
Krenek, Ernst	The Bell Tower composed 1955-56
Arthur Miller	
Ward, Robert	The Crucible 1961
Eugene O'Neill	
Gruenberg, Louis	The Emperor Jones (1933)
Levy, Martin David	Mourning Becomes Electra 1967
Gertrude Stein	
Thomson, Virgil	The Mother of Us All (1947)

John Steinbeck

Floyd, Carlisle

Of Mice and Men (1971)

Harriet Beecher Stowe

Ferrari-Trecate, Luigi  
Florio, Caryl  
Giorza, Paolo

La Capanna dello zio Tom 1953  
Uncle Tom's Cabin 1882  
La Capanna dello zio Tom 1859

Mark Twain

Foss, Lucas

The Jumping Frog of Calaveras County  
(1951)

John Greenleaf Wittier

Bonner, Eugene

Barbara Frietchie (from the play by  
Clyde Fitch) composed 1920

Tennessee Williams

Hoiby, Lee

Summer and Smoke 1971

<sup>9</sup>Joseph Kerman, Opera as Drama (New York: Vintage Books, 1956), p. 108.

<sup>10</sup>Christoph Willibald Gluck, "Four Letters," in The Essence of Opera, p. 106.

<sup>11</sup>Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, "Letters to His Father," in The Essence of Opera, p. 131.

<sup>12</sup>Henri Beyle, Life of Rossini in The Essence of Opera, p. 198.

<sup>13</sup>George Bernard Shaw, "The Tone Poet," Shaw on Music in The Essence of Opera, p. 184.

<sup>14</sup>Arthur Schopenhauer, The World as Will and Idea in The Essence of Opera, p. 184.

<sup>15</sup>Richard Wagner, Opera and Drama in The Essence of Opera, p. 220.

<sup>16</sup>Friedrich Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy in The Essence of Opera, p. 228.

<sup>17</sup>Edward J. Dent, Opera (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1949), pp. 83-84.

<sup>18</sup>Grand Opera, ed. Anthony Gishford (New York: Viking Press, 1972), p. 120.

<sup>19</sup>E. M. Forster, Aspects of the Novel (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1927), p. 85.

<sup>20</sup>Herman Melville, Billy Budd, Sailor, ed. Harrison Hayford and Merton M. Sealts, Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), p. 74.

<sup>21</sup>Lehman Engel, Words and Music (New York: Macmillan Company, 1972), p. 21.

<sup>22</sup>Henry James, "Henry James: The Dramatic Years," an Introductory Essay by Leon Edel, The Complete Plays of Henry James (New York: J. P. Lippincott, Co., 1949), p. 62.

## CHAPTER ONE LOCALIZATION

Localization, the most utilitarian use of background material in a novel, "is a practical matter of placing the characters in an environment within which they can act out their stories."<sup>1</sup> In fiction, localization is presented through a variety of methods. First, large blocks of descriptive narration often present the setting to the reader. Delivered through the narrator of the story, these passages usually present an objective picture of the setting. Next, dialogue often conveys information about the setting. When presented through dialogue, the picture of the setting is often colored by the nature of the individual speaking. Last, the interior monologue presents the setting through the mind of the character. This method is especially successful in revealing a character's personal reactions to his environment. But fictional setting utilized in opera must be presented by one of two methods: 1.) through the stage scenery or 2.) through dramatically presented descriptions of the setting.

### I Stage Scenery

The power of the adaptive librettist, as Patrick Smith points out, exists "not only in organizing a work for the operatic stage but also in preserving as much as possible of the original in the adaptation." (Smith, p. 174). In each libretto studied, the librettists from J. H. Wainwright to Kenward Elmslie have in varying degrees retained settings from the original source. The single interior setting of the Van Tassel

farmhouse in Stephen Vincent Benet's The Headless Horseman, intended for amateur production, is practical, but produces little of the mysterious atmosphere created through setting in Irving's tale. On the other hand, Myfanwy Piper in The Turn of the Screw and in Owen Wingrave and Kenward Elmslie in Washington Square have each adapted a large number of settings from the respective original sources. In each libretto, the settings remain faithful to James' original works both in local and in effect. For instance, in Chapter III of Washington Square, Henry James devotes considerable length to a description of Dr. Sloper's house: ". . . a handsome, modern, wide-fronted house, with a big balcony before the drawing-room window, and a flight of white marble steps ascending to a portal which was also faced with white marble."<sup>2</sup> Kenward Elmslie in his libretto emphasizes Dr. Sloper's house through a unique visual presentation of the setting. In Act I, ii, Dr. Sloper, his daughter Catherine, and Aunt Lavinia appear in an open carriage, behind which "the skeletal structure of the Sloper house can be seen, dimly. In the course of the scene, the structure gradually moves closer to them, slowly becoming more sharply outlined."<sup>3</sup> At the conclusion of the scene, the facade of the mansion appears in solid form, "with marble steps and a grand and imposing front door" (Elmslie, p. 25). Fourteen of the sixteen scenes in the opera are set in various rooms in the house or in the park facing the house. This scenic mobility creates an emphasis on setting similar in effect to that achieved by James.

Often a librettist will create settings not in the original. This adaptive practice appears to be a contradiction to the necessity for simplifying the original material. However, this alteration in setting is often necessitated by dramatic action. Hawthorne locates the action

of his story "The Maypole of Merry Mount" in a single setting, the New England settlement at Merry Mount. The venerated Maypole, stained in seven brilliant hues and decorated with ribbons, banners, and flowers in a multitude of colors, occupies the center of the scene. This colorful setting, filled with colonists dressed in an array of wild and colorful costumes, is framed by the "black surrounding woods"<sup>4</sup> from which the "grim Puritans" (Hawthorne, p. 77) watch the activities.

In Richard Stokes's three act libretto, Merry Mount, the forest, peripheral in Hawthorne's story, serves as the local for Act II, ii. The personal conflict within the Puritan leader, Wrestling Bradford, the opera's hero, involves his ideal of priestly purity and his sexual desire. This inner conflict is paralleled in the social conflict between the Puritans and the Cavaliers, residents at Merry Mount. Following the destruction of the Maypole by the Puritans (Act I, i), Bradford brings the colonist Lady Marigold Sandys into the forest setting where he makes advances toward her and renounces his vows as a priest. Fearing his soul is damned, he curses Marigold and prays. Overcome, he collapses. This forest setting leads directly into the opera's most original setting: "Bradford's Dream: The Hellish Rendezvous."

Directly behind Bradford, a curtain rises divulging "his dream of the Valley of Tophet--an infernal glen with ramparts of sandstone, laval-glazed and rain-marked in purple and black. . . . Across the back extends a massive and lofty cliff, with a great arch at the left to give it the form of a cyclopean bridge."<sup>5</sup> In the center of the stage, where the Maypole had stood in the earlier scene, a giant toadstool now overshadows all. Phosphorescent shimmers, fireflies, will-o-the-wisps,

imps, witches, and devils populate the stage. This nightmarish setting has no parallel in Hawthorne's story; however, it has dramatic relevancy. In addition to possessing high theatrical qualities, e.g. lavish scenery brilliant costumes, visual and aural excitement, this setting contributes to characterization. Bradford's fear of spiritual damnation through submission to sexual desires is dramatized in this ghoulish setting.

The main setting of Melville's Billy Budd is the military vessel, H. M. S. Bellipotent. In various locations aboard this ship, the events of the story occur. This central setting is framed by a series of minor locations mentioned by the narrator. In Chapter 1, he describes a black sailor whom he had seen once in Liverpool. After Budd's execution, the narrator mentions Gibraltar, the scene of Captain Vere's death, and Portsmouth, the city in which the ballad "Billy in the Darbies" was published.

E. M. Forster and Eric Crozier, co-librettists of Benjamin Britten's Billy Budd, locate the central action in the opera on board the H.M.S. Indomitable. This setting is framed in the opera by an original setting in the Prologue and the Epilogue, which serves a three-fold dramatic purpose. First, the new set places Captain Vere outside the main action of the opera. In Melville's novel, Vere dies from a battle wound. In the libretto, Vere does not die, but "is revealed as an old man"<sup>6</sup> in this frame setting, remembering the events surrounding Billy Budd. The locale of this setting is not specified, and the time is suggested only by Vere's altered physical appearance. Second, the Epilogue provides a release from the tension of the hanging scene which "is so tense and



its impact so overwhelming that time is needed for the audience to recover."<sup>7</sup> Third, this falling off achieved by the use of the Epilogue parallels in effect the final three chapters of Melville's novel, which relate respectively the information of Vere's death, a naval report of the Budd affair, and the ultimate effect of Billy Budd upon the sailors who had witnessed his death.

Washington Irving presents lengthy descriptions of various settings in "Rip Van Winkle" before Rip falls asleep for twenty years: the village in which Rip lives, the "deep mountain glen, wild, lonely, and shagged"<sup>8</sup> from which a keg-bearing stranger dressed in "antique Dutch fashion" (Irving, p. 53) emerges, the "hollow, like a small amphitheatre" (p. 53) where Rip plays nine-pins with the strange men. After Rip awakens, Irving presents the same locations in reverse order. Moving from the mountain hollow to the wild glen and, finally, to the village, Irving describes the natural changes in the setting which occurred during Rip's absence.

These locales are adapted as the various settings in Acts I and III of J. H. Wainwright's Rip Van Winkle. The whole of Act II is set in 1777, while Rip is absent from the action of the story. Wainwright expressed his intentions in creating Act II in his "Preface": "In Irving's story, he has marked the contrast between the two eras. It has been attempted here to relate some of the incidents by which that contrast was brought about."<sup>9</sup> The settings of Act II, scenes i and iii are those of the village square and Dame Van Winkle's house in Act I, altered now to indicate the passage of time, e.g. a portrait of George Washington has replaced one of King George, which had hung over the tavern door. The

setting for scene ii, "the bivouac of the Continentals" in "a rocky pass" (Wainwright, p. 26) has no parallel in Irving's story. This setting provides the background for action involving Rip's daughter Alice in an operatic love triangle.

While he may frequently add scenes, the librettist will omit fictional settings far more often. This major decision is part of the simplification process in organizing the fictional material for operatic treatment. This basic rule of operatic adaptation is based upon two criteria: an action in the plot is omitted from the libretto, making the setting in which it occurs unnecessary, or the action is retained as part of the libretto but is transferred to a different setting. The number of scenes omitted from the fictional sources studied is very numerous. To prevent confusion, I shall choose only settings of major significance for illustration.

The inclusive panoramic setting of Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter is Boston in the 1640's. Within this general setting, Hawthorne localizes his action in a series of specific locations, e.g. the market-place in Chapter I, the prison cell in Chapter IV, and the forest setting in Chapters XVI-XIX. George Parsons Lathrop in his libretto The Scarlet Letter and Frederick Carlson in his libretto Hester utilize these settings. However, both librettists eliminate two of the same settings in Hawthorne's novel. In Chapter X, "The Leech and His Patient," Roger Chillingworth sits at an "open window, that looked toward the grave-yard."<sup>10</sup> Roger and his patient Arthur Dimmesdale discuss the evil consequences of self-deception in this interior setting. In Chapter XIV, as Hester and (her husband) Roger walk along the seashore they consider who is to

blame for their present circumstances. However, as George Marek explains in Opera as Theatre, "There is not much room for philosophical animadversions in an opera."<sup>11</sup> These philosophical discussions and the settings in which they are located are eliminated from both librettos.

The scope of settings available to a novelist is unlimited. Both the number of settings and their locales can be as few or as many as necessary. Nowhere is this possibility of variety in fictional settings more clearly seen than in the novels of Henry James. In the two volumes of The Wings of the Dove, various settings, both interior and exterior, are presented in America, England, Switzerland, and Italy. The scenes in the novel which occur at the house of Marian Condrip, Kate Croy's impoverished sister, are eliminated from Ethan Ayer's libretto. The poverty associated with Marian's house offers one of the many contrasts in the novel to the wealth and sumptuousness of Lancaster Gate, the residence of Kate's Aunt Maud. This scenic contrast is absent from the libretto. Numerous other settings are also eliminated. Milly's London hotel suite in which she hosts an elaborate dinner party is rejected by the librettist. No outdoor scenes are included in the libretto: Kensington Gardens, the great St. Mark's Piazza in Venice, and the well-known setting in the Swiss Alps in which Milly Theale, the heroine, precariously sits on a "slab of rock at the end of a short promontory . . . that . . . pointed off to the right into gulfs of air. . . ."<sup>12</sup> This great variety of settings is reduced in the opera to four interior settings in six scenes: a parlor at Lancaster Gate, the National Gallery, the courtyard at the Palazzo Leporelli in Venice, and Milly's sitting room in the Palazzo.

The interior settings of Miles Standish's house and Priscilla's house in Longfellow's narrative poem The Courtship of Miles Standish are faithfully adapted by Frederick Carlson for his libretto. The exterior settings, with the exception of the seashore scene in which the Mayflower sails for England, are eliminated. In section VII of the poem, for instance, Standish and his men march through "forest, swamp, and along the trend of the sea-shore."<sup>13</sup> The party visits an Indian encampment "pitched on the edge of a meadow, between the sea and the forest . . ." (Longfellow, p. 331). In this setting a fight occurs in which Standish kills Pecksuot, an Indian warrior. With his men, Standish defeats the entire tribe. The effect achieved in cutting the march and the settings in which it occurs is the elimination of the accompanying violence from the libretto.

In two operas studied, settings were eliminated by the librettist when the narrators of the original sources were dropped. Fred Ingham, the narrator of Edward Everett Hale's "The Man Without a Country," relates the story of Philip Nolan, based largely on naval tradition and myth surrounding Nolan. In his narration, Ingham either appears in or mentions numerous settings, e.g. the "Mission house in Mackinaw" where he first appears in the story or the settings in which he had first hand knowledge of Nolan: the schooner filled with Negro slaves, the George Washington corvette off the coast of Buenos Aires, and Alexandria, Egypt. All of these settings are omitted from the libretto. Ingham receives a letter from a friend, Danforth, which presents the circumstances surrounding the final part of Nolan's life. The setting of the interior of Nolan's

stateroom described in Danforth's letter is omitted from the libretto. None of the melancholic action associated with Nolan's final scenes about the United States is included in the libretto. The numerous scenes in the short story located in settings from various parts of the world help to suggest the painful isolation of Nolan's life. The settings also emphasize his pathetic attempts to know something of America and to give direction to his existence. The homemade maps and charts which line Nolan's stateroom as well as the numerous objects there provide a meaning for his life in exile: "'Here, you see, I have a country!'"<sup>14</sup> These final scenes in the story, which provide contentment for Nolan, are omitted from the libretto. After the courtmartial scene, the remainder of the action in the opera takes place on board the Nautilus. In the short story, Nolan dies quietly with a sense of dignity and resignation among the belongings in his stateroom which he had come to treasure. In the opera, he dies in battle the death of a naval hero on board the vessel on which he had been imprisoned.

In Mark Twain's "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County" both Garrulous Simon Wheeler and the Eastener to whom he tells the story of Daniel, the frog, are narrators. The staid, humorless Easterner tells of a friend who had asked him to locate one Leonidas W. Smiley. However, instead of finding Smiley, the Easterner turns up Simon Wheeler. Both men appear "by the barroom stove of the dilapidated tavern in the decayed mining camp of Angel's. . . ." <sup>15</sup> This setting is replaced in Jean Karsavina's libretto by "Uncle Henry's Bar in Calaveras."<sup>16</sup> The action localized in this setting concerns only the story of Jim Smiley and his wager with a Stranger on the jumping merits of a frog.

The various settings, both interior and exterior, which contribute to the mysterious atmosphere in Washington Irving's "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" are reduced in The Headless Horseman by Stephen Vincent Benét to one interior setting: a large comfortable room in the Van Tassel farmhouse. This use of a single set creates a dual effect. First, in the tale by Irving the men gather outside on the veranda to tell ghost tales. In the darkness of this setting, the moonlight and the glow from the men's pipes are the only sources of illumination of the scene. The contrast achieved between the setting inside the house associated with the gaiety of the party and the setting outside associated with the superstition of the tales is a quality in the story eliminated from the libretto by the use of the single set. Second, in the libretto the phantom horseman appears at the door of the room on foot instead of appearing mysteriously on horseback among the shadows as in Irving's tale. Ichabod Crane sees the ghost at the door and dives through the window pursued by the Headless Horseman, who throws the pumpkinhead after him.<sup>17</sup> In this chase scene, the single set arrangement introduces the implausible situation in which not one person in the crowded room attempts to apprehend the horseman. The quality of Irving's chase scene with its characteristic mixture of humor and horror is reduced in the libretto to slapstick comedy. Finally, the scene points up the fact that certain fictional scenes cannot be successfully transferred to the stage, the scene in Irving's tale, for example, where Ichabod is pursued by the Headless Horseman on horseback which involves a chase down a road, across a bridge, and part way up the hill beyond.

A librettist will often retain the action of the original story while placing it in a new locale. For example, in Twain's story of Daniel, the frog, the jumping contest takes place inside the saloon. In Karsavina's libretto The Jumping Frog of Calaveras County, the contest is held outdoors before the saloon. The change offers variety of setting but little else. A chorus of townspeople is added to the libretto, but this group could just as logically have been located inside the saloon. The changing of the court-martial scene in "A Man Without a Country" from Fort Adams in Hale's story to Charleston, South Carolina, in Guiterman's libretto has no effect on the story itself. The only rationale for changing this location from a military installation to a large metropolitan courtroom is to offer the opportunity for a more elaborate stage setting.

In three librettos studied, Billy Budd, The Wings of the Dove, and The Courtship of Miles Standish, the localization of action into a new setting produces significant changes from the originals. In Melville's manuscripts of Billy Budd, the warship was variously referred to as both the Indomitable and the Bellipotent. However, as William T. Stafford points out, the choice of which name is most effective has little critical importance "for the ironic contrast with the Rights-of-Man is apparent enough in either case. . . ." <sup>18</sup> In the novel, Billy Budd is first seen on the Rights-of-Man. Impressed into duty, Budd is taken by launch to the Bellipotent. While in the launch, he utters the apostrophe, "And good-bye to you too, old Rights-of-Man." <sup>19</sup> In the libretto, Budd sings his farewell with the same words; however, he is on board the

Indomitable, not in the launch. The dramatic result in both cases is the same: the lieutenant in charge orders him to be silent. The irony implied in Budd's farewell, but not intended by him, is strengthened in the opera by having him deliver it from the ship onto which he has just been impressed.

In the opening scene of James's The Wings of the Dove, Kate Croy visits her father at his residence in Chirk Street. Alone at first, Kate notices the poor, cheap surroundings in which her father is forced to live. She moves from "the shabby sofa to the armchair upholstered in a glazed cloth that gave at once--she had tried it--the sense of the slippery and of the sticky" (James, I, 19). She looks "at the sallow prints in the walls and at the lonely magazines, a year old, that combined, with a small lamp in coloured glass and a knitted-white centre-piece wanting freshness, to enhance the effect of the purplish cloth on the principal table . . ." (James, I, 19). In the scene, Kate discovers that her father has misspent an inheritance from his wife and is now discredited.

A parallel meeting between Kate and her father with a similar exchange of information occurs in the first scene of Ayer's libretto. However, the setting has been transferred to the gaudy splendor of Aunt Maud's parlor at Lancaster Gate: "It is a room in the flounce, brass, marble and mahogany of the Edwardian Era. A 'conversation piece' with a palm in it sprouts from the middle of the room and a Gothic arch spans its side. There are sundry formed, semi-upholstered chairs about and a tiger skin rug in front of the piano."<sup>20</sup> Mr. Croy's residence in Chirk Street and the subsequent settings in Lancaster Gate in James's novel



give the original material a rich, suggestive contrast of wealth and poverty, not evident in the libretto.

Frederick Carlson, in a note prefacing his libretto The Courtship of Miles Standish, explains that his "libretto stands, arranged, almost as the poem."<sup>21</sup> Two actions in Longfellow's poem were shifted to different locations in Carlson's libretto. The wedding of John Alden and Pricilla occurs at the end of both the poem and the libretto. The action remains the same in both instances. In Longfellow, the wedding is set inside the church. After the ceremony, the crowd moves to the outdoors in front of the church. Carlson explains he "changed the wedding scene from a 'room' to an 'open space before the church.'" This change of locale for the wedding has no effect on the action. A more revealing example occurs early in the story. In Part III of the poem John Alden leaves Standish's house in a state of great agitation. He has sworn to deliver Standish's declaration of love to Pricilla, the girl he himself loves. John hurries through the woods in haste and confusion. Longfellow uses the setting to heighten John's desperation. The peaceful surroundings through which John rushes contrast with his inner turmoil:

So the strong will prevailed, and Alden went on his  
errand,  
Out of the street of the village, and into the paths  
of the forest,  
Into the tranquil woods, where bluebirds and robins  
were building  
Towns in the populous trees, with hanging gardens of  
verdure,  
Peaceful, aerial cities of joy and affection and freedom.  
All around him was calm, but within him commotion  
and conflict,  
Love contending with friendship, and self with each  
generous impulse.  
To and fro in his breast his thoughts were heaving and  
dashing. . . . (Longfellow, pp. 296-97)

In Act I of the opera, the same situation happens. John has told Miles he will deliver the message of love to Priscilla. However, Alden remains in the room when Standish exits. The sense of loss and frustration expressed by Alden in the poem as he hurries toward Priscilla's house is weakened in the libretto. Alden remains in the room and declaims his feelings. Alden's immediate need to escape into the open air is lost in the libretto. In the poem, he must get outside where he can think. This sense of urgency expressed by Alden in both his words and his actions in contrast to the peaceful environment is missing from the libretto.

## II Dramatic Presentation

Characters in opera often present information dramatically to establish the locale. Usually, the characters present straightforward description borrowed directly from the fictional source. The gathering in scene i of Kenward Elmslie's libretto Washington Square is identified by a guest as an engagement party. On discovering the crack in his newly forged bell, Bannadonna in Ernst Kreneck's The Bell Tower describes this fact to the audience. The various officers and seamen identify the vessel in Billy Budd as the "Indomitable" and as "a seventy-four." In Act II, iii of Billy Budd, Forster and Crozier borrow words from "Billy in the Darbies," the poem which concludes Melville's novel, to describe the setting. Billy sings: "Look! Through the port comes the moonshine astray! It tips the guard's cutlass and silvers this nook . . ." (Forster and Crozier, pp. 297-98). In Chapter 24 of Melville's

novel, Budd sits in irons in a bay of the gun-deck following his court-martial. The scene is described in contrasts between light and dark. Light comes from two sources: two battle lanterns and the moonlight filtering through the open gun ports. "Fed with oil supplied by the war contractors . . ., with flickering splashes of dirty yellow light they pollute the pale moonshine all but ineffectively struggling in obstructed flecks through the open ports from which the tampioned cannon protrude" (Melville, p. 119). By contrast with Melville's version, the moonlight as described by Budd in the libretto is stronger and colors the setting with a brighter glow.

In fiction and in opera a character's personal reactions to his environment may be conveyed through dramatic presentation of locale. In Part I of James's The Turn of the Screw, the Governess contrasts her initial impression of Bly with her feelings about the house after her unusual experience there. As she wrote, the Governess admitted that Bly was actually big, ugly, and antique. Her impression of Bly upon having arrived there years before, however, had been far more romantic. The size of the house and the splendor of its surroundings had been to her youthful imagination more magnificent than the castle of fairytales: "But my little conductress (Flora), with her hair of gold and her frock of blue danced before me round corners and pattered down passages, I had the view of a castle of romance inhabited by a rosy sprite, such a place as would somehow, for diversion of the young idea, take all colour out of storybooks and fairytales."<sup>22</sup> In Benjamin Britten's The Turn of The

Screw, adapted by Myfanwy Piper, the Governess briefly describes the house and the grounds of Bly upon her arrival. "The scene and the park are so splendid, far grander than I am used to."<sup>23</sup> She continues by giving her romantic reactions to the house and by specifying the location by name: "I shall feel like a princess, a princess here! Bly, I begin to love you, to love you, Bly!" (Piper, p. 18-19). The Governess's description of Bly and the initial impression of the setting upon her closely parallel the passage in James's novel.

The most unusual localization through dramatic presentation occurs in a combination of scenes in Piper's The Turn of the Screw. To convey the omniscient evil at Bly, Piper created a scene for the libretto which has no precedent in James's story. In Act II, i designated as "Nowhere" in the libretto, the lights fade in on Quint and Miss Jessel. The meaning of this abstract setting is explained in the words which the Ghosts sing in the previous scene, Act I, viii. This earlier scene in which all six of the opera's characters appear on stage together is reminiscent of the well-known scene in James in which the Governess looking out a window at Bly discovers Miles standing on the moonlit lawn below and believes he is actually watching Quint on the tower directly above her. In the libretto, Quint and Miss Jessel tell Miles and Flora they are located everywhere. If the children simply look, they will find the ghosts. "On the paths, in the woods, on the banks, by the walls, in the long lush grass, or the winter's fallen leaves, I wait" (Piper, p. 94). Quint and Miss Jessel, in short, permeate

Bly and its surroundings with evil. Myfanwy Piper, by treating this setting in general terms, created an atmosphere of horror suggestive of James's story. James believed he could free himself from the necessity of creating any specific picture of evil by presenting to the reader an intense, generalized picture of evil. "Make him think evil, make him think it for himself, and you are released from weak specifications."<sup>24</sup> The effect of this abstract localization is directed at the audience. The opera-goer who reads the libretto or witnesses a production supplies his own specifics concerning the nature of evil.

In James's The Wings of the Dove, Merton Densher visits Lancaster Gate for an interview with Aunt Maud whose plan for Kate is simple: to see her niece married to a wealthy man. Densher is a newspaper reporter and is conscious that Aunt Maud disapproves of him. As he waits for her, Densher, in an interior monologue, observes the elaborate furnishings of the house and becomes hopelessly aware of the difference between his world and that of Aunt Maud.

He had never dreamed of anything so fringed and scalloped, so buttoned and corded, drawn everywhere so tight and curled everywhere so thick. He had never dreamed of so much gilt and glass, so much satin and plush, so much rosewood and marble and malachite. But it was above all the solid forms, the wasted finish, the misguided cost, the general attestation of morality and money, a good conscience and a big balance. (James, p. 79)

These descriptive words registered by Densher's mind in the novel are borrowed by Ethan Ayer for use in his libretto to describe the same setting. However, in the libretto the description is oral rather than

mental, and it is given by Kate's father Homer Croy, rather than by her lover Miles Dunster. As in the novel, Kate's father has gambled his fortune away. In scene i as he looks at the furnishings of Lancaster Gate, Mr. Croy sings: "Whoever dreamed of anything so fringed and scalloped, so buttoned and corded, drawn ev'rywhere so tight, and curled ev'rywhere so thick? Whoever dreamed of so much gilt and glass, so much satin and plush, so much rosewood and marble and malachite; such solid forms, such wasted finish, such wasted cost" (Ayer, pp. 3-5)? The effect of this description is different from the hopeless awareness that comes to Densher in the novel. Mr. Croy's response to this richness reveals his envy for lost opportunities and his bitterness against those people who possess what he has thrown away.

The chorus in an opera often localizes the action dramatically. Charles Hamm in his book, Opera, describes several functions of a chorus. In the first of these the chorus performs "the function of setting the stage for the first scene, of helping to establish the locale. . . ." <sup>25</sup> Functioning as a narrator, the chorus can present straight description, as in this passage from Carlson's The Courtship of Miles Standish borrowed directly from Longfellow's poem:

Forth from the curtain of clouds,  
     from the tent of purple and scarlet,  
 Rises the sun, the great high priest  
     in his garments resplendent (Carlson, n.p.)

In J. H. Wainwright's Rip Van Winkle, the chorus describes the temporal setting, using words by the librettist:

The summer has faded fast away,  
 And autumn is advancing  
 We've mowed the hay from the verdant plain--  
 'Mid the stubble the partridge is feeding. (Wainwright, p. 5)

The chorus can localize the setting and the characters while participating in the action of the scene. In Stephen Vincent Benet's The Headless Horseman, the female chorus introduces the heroine and identifies the gathering as a quilting bee. They sing of the one activity common to all such occasions, gossiping:

Quilt and patch, patch and quilt, bzz, bzz, bzz!  
 I said to him, he said to you, and don't you think he is?  
 His eyes are blank, his hair is brown, he's quite the  
     nicest boy in town.  
 Of course, mama pretends to frown, bzz, bzz, bzz! (Benét, p. 1)

The operatic chorus localizes setting a second way. While the on-stage action proceeds in the location seen by the audience, a chorus placed off stage suggests the existence of another location. The trial scene (IV, i) of Verdi's Aida provides an outstanding example of this use of the chorus. On stage in the halls of an Egyptian temple, Amneris, the Egyptian princess, listens and responds to the trial proceedings which occur off stage. The existence of a trial chamber is suggested by an off-stage male chorus of high priests who interrogate, judge, and ultimately sentence Rhadames to death for treason. The effect upon an audience achieved by this scenic device is explained by Hamm: "It is as though we are given a glimpse of a second set" (Hamm, p. 108).

Among the librettos studied, Koanga makes the most extensive use of the off-stage chorus.<sup>26</sup> As a backdrop for much of the on-stage action

in Act I, an off-stage chorus of Negroes heard singing work songs suggests the setting of the sugarcane fields where they labor. The whole of Act III consists of the pursuit, capture, and death of Koanga. The on-stage setting represents a pagan altar located in a swamp. The off-stage chorus calling on the Voudou gods of Koanga represent Negroes making their way through the swamp to meet at the on-stage location. Later in the act another off-stage chorus is identified by Palmyra as a group of hunters who are pursuing Koanga. These men give a "wild cry" of triumph when they capture Koanga in the off-stage location.

The off-stage chorus can be used as a foil to on-stage action, while it suggests another location. In Act I, ii of Billy Budd, Captain Vere and two of his officers, Redburn and Flint, speak together of the recently suppressed mutinies at the Nore and at Spithead and of their constant fear of new mutinies. Under this serious discussion can be heard an off-stage chorus of men singing lighthearted sea chanties. Vere's two officers reveal their suspicions about the dangerous nature of the new recruit, Billy Budd, and express their general distrust of the crew. Vere listens to his men singing below deck. He dismisses his officers' suspicions of Budd and of the crew and assures them that as long as the men are happy, mutiny is not an immediate concern. The officers leave and the scene closes with Captain Vere thoughtfully listening to the crew singing.

Scenery and dramatic presentation of the setting are the librettist's tools to localize action and character. In adapting a literary work



as a libretto, the librettist bases his choice of locales in his story on two criteria: dramatic relevancy and operatic adaptability. Original settings are often created for a libretto either to fulfill a dramatic idea not in the original fiction or to produce on stage a quality in the fictional work, e.g. the appearances and vocalizing of the Ghosts and the atmosphere of evil they convey in the scene "Nowhere" in The Turn of the Screw. Vast numbers of settings in novels and short stories are omitted because they are not adaptable to stage presentation, e.g. the lengthy descriptions of the Swiss Alps and of St. Mark's square in Venice presented in The Wings of the Dove. The stage scenery and the dramatic environment. The elaborate stage setting in Merry Mount for "The Hellish Rendezvous" visualizes the mental state of the opera's leading character. Dramatic presentation of setting can function like the interior monologue in fiction to reveal attitudes and responses of a character to his environment.

Notes

<sup>1</sup>D. S. Bland, "Endangering the Reader's Neck: Background Description in the Novel," Criticism, III (1961), 24.

<sup>2</sup>The American Novels and Short Stories of Henry James, ed. F. O. Matthiessen (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964), p. 171.

<sup>3</sup>Kerward Elmslie, Washington Square (New York: Belwin-Mills Publishing Company, 1976), p. 22.

<sup>4</sup>Nathaniel Hawthorne, Twice-Told Tales (Boston: Houghton Mifflin and Company, 1882), p. 79.

<sup>5</sup>Richard Stokes, Merry Mount (New York: Harms, Inc., 1933), p. iv.

<sup>6</sup>E. M. Forster and Eric Crozier, Billy Budd (London: Boosey & Hawkes, 1961), p. 1.

<sup>7</sup>Eric Walter White, Benjamin Britten, A Sketch of His Life and Works (London: Boosey & Hawkes, 1948), p. 162. Hereafter cited as Sketch.

<sup>8</sup>The Complete Works of Washington Irving, IX (New York: Putnam's Sons, 1882), 52.

<sup>9</sup>J. H. Wainwright, Rip Van Winkle (New York: Corby & Darcie, 1855), p. 4.

<sup>10</sup>The Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, I (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1968), 131.

<sup>11</sup>George Marek, Opera as Theatre (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1962), p. 168.

<sup>12</sup>Henry James, The Wings of the Dove, I (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909), 123.

<sup>13</sup>The Poetical Works of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, II, Riverside Edition (New York: Houghton Mifflin and Company, 1889), 330.

<sup>14</sup>The Works of Edward Everett Hale, I (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1918), 55.

<sup>15</sup>The Writings of Mark Twain, Sketches Old and New, Author's National Edition, XIX (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1903), 27.

<sup>16</sup>Jean Karsavina, The Jumping Frog of Calaveras County (New York: Carl Fischer, Inc., 1951), p. 12.

<sup>17</sup>Stephen Vincent Benét, The Headless Horseman (Boston: E. C. Schirmer, 1937), p. 111.

<sup>18</sup>Willaim T. Stafford, "The New Billy Budd and the Novelistic Fallacy: An Essay-Review," Modern Fiction Studies, 8 (Autumn 1962), 308.

<sup>19</sup>Herman Melville, Billy Budd, Sailor, ed. Harrison Hayford and Merton M. Sealts, Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), p. 19.

<sup>20</sup>Ethan Ayer, The Wings of the Dove (New York: G. Schirmer, Inc., 1963), p. 1.

<sup>21</sup>Frederick Carlson, The Courtship of Miles Standish, microfilm (Chicago: Newberry Library, n.d.), n.p.

<sup>22</sup>The Complete Tales of Henry James, ed. Leon Edel 10 (New York: J. P. Lippincott Company, 1964), 27.

<sup>23</sup>Myfanwy Piper, The Turn of the Screw (London: Hawkes and Sons, 1955), pp. 17-18.

<sup>24</sup>The Novels and Tales of Henry James, "Preface," XII (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1908), XXI.

<sup>25</sup>Charles Hamm, Opera (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1966), p. 104.

<sup>26</sup>Of the sixteen operas studied in this dissertation, eight use an off stage chorus to suggest another location; five operas have choruses but do not use them in this manner; and three operas have no chorus.

## CHAPTER TWO

### SETTING: THREE FUNCTIONS

Settings in adapted opera librettos often function like settings in their fictional sources. Frequently, an author will manipulate his description so as to make the setting reinforce the various moods and emotions of a character. Although D. S. Bland relates this use of setting specifically to nineteenth-century authors, he recognizes that the "association of mood and situation with setting remains a staple of fictional description" (Bland, p. 127). The description of setting can achieve another purpose in addition to reinforcing mood and emotions. When a setting suggests more than the author actually states, description "can rise to the level of symbol" (Bland, p. 139).

Setting in opera librettos can both parallel the moods and emotions of a character and also function as symbol. These aspects of setting are achieved in opera through the lyrics of the libretto and various forms of stage machinery. Finally, settings can contribute to the structure of a libretto. In an adaptive libretto, this use of setting can aid in achieving a structure similar to that of the fictional source.

#### I Settings Which can Reinforce the Mood of a Character

In James's The Wings of the Dove, Merton Densher, who accompanies Milly Theale to Venice, visits her on a more personal basis than her other friends do. Yet upon arrival at her Palazzo one day, Densher learns he has been forbidden entrance. Standing in the damp loggia talking with Eugenio, Densher experiences "a sudden sharp sense that

everything had turned to the dismal" (James, II, 258). The gusts of the first sea storm of the season are strong in this scene. The beginning of this storm, soon to break in its fullest fury, parallels at this point the beginning of Densher's own turmoil of emotions. Baffled by this denial of admission, he leaves the palace and walks through Venice to the great Piazza. Unexpectedly, Densher sees Lord Mark, a London acquaintance. Knowing Lord Mark had pressed hard in the past to marry Milly and puzzled as to why he should now be in Venice, Densher begins to make connections. He senses that the direct cause for his banishment rests with the sudden appearance of Lord Mark in Venice. As he realizes this truth, the storm reaches its most violent intensity. In this highly emotional state, Densher blames Lord Mark both for his banishment from the Palazzo Leporelli and for the state of the weather. "The vice in the air, otherwise, was too much like the breath of fate. The weather had changed, the rain was ugly, the wind wicked, the sea impossible, because of Lord Mark. It was because of him, a fortiori, that the palace was closed" (James, II, 263). Several weeks later, Densher is unexpectedly summoned to the Palazzo Leporelli. On the day he receives the invitation, the weather is described as "a bath of warm air, a pageant of autumn light" (James, II, 304). The emotional experiences of Densher during this episode progress from a mood of gloom and despair to one of optimism and hope. These responses are paralleled and underscored by the change in the weather, beginning with the darkness and gloom of an unusually violent storm and ending with the brilliance and warmth of a beautiful autumn day.

In scene v of his libretto, Ethan Ayer uses stage machinery and lyrics to establish a relation between the setting and the mood of Miles Dunster (Merton Densher in the novel). The storm scene in the novel has been combined with a reconciliation of Milly and Miles in scene v of the opera. Having been banished from the Palazzo before scene v begins, Miles comes to Milly's residence in the hope of seeing her. While he awaits admission, he describes the storm outside to Milly's servant in words derived from James.<sup>1</sup>

It is a Venice all of lashing rain  
and of cold black sky  
Of raging wicked wind  
through narrow passes.(Ayer, p. 140).

At this point in the opera, Miles does not know why he has been denied entrance. Rather than drawing his own conclusions, Dunster learns the reason from Milly in this scene. Lord Mark had revealed to her the love between Miles and Kate Croy. Left alone with this knowledge and an awakened sense of guilt at his betrayal of Milly, Miles listens at the window as the storm increases in intensity. In the novel considerably more emphasis is given to the description of the storm and to its relation to the mood of Merton Densher. However, the storm in both the libretto and the novel is used to give direct emphasis to his state of confusion upon being refused entrance to the palace and to his subsequent anger upon realizing Lord Mark was the direct cause.

Hester is a second libretto to reinforce some mood of character through use of the setting. Chapters XVI-XIX of Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter and Act IV of Carlson's libretto are set in the forest. In the novel, Hester and Arthur meet, discuss their lives during the previous

seven years, and resolve to flee Boston together in search of a happier life. In Carlson's adaptation, Arthur tells Hester that it is useless to flee. He believes that no physical or geographical barrier will prevent Chillingworth from following them. After a while Hester leaves, and Arthur is left alone. Immediately, a distant roll of thunder is heard, and a flash of lightning illuminates the set. Arthur sees visions of Chillingworth watching from the undergrowth. He expresses his fear in a highly melodramatic fashion, and the librettist has indicated in the text stage directions for scenic effects which are intended to parallel Arthur's feelings.

Arthur: Ah, what new terror am I feeling,  
                   (The rumble of distant thunder is heard.)  
 What darkness around me stealing,  
                   (Flashes of lightning are seen.)  
 God has surely curs'd me.  
                   (Dark clouds appear thicker and thicker.)  
 'Tis that old friend at my elbow day and night.  
 See, he's there and there! Everywhere!  
                   (Flashes of lightning continue.)  
 A spirit out of hell!  
                   (as thou' rushing at him.)  
 Thou old fiend get thee hence, get thee hence!  
 Thou meant not to curse me, but to kill me!  
 For mercy to heav'n I cry! To heav'n I cry!  
                   (The thunder grows louder and the lightning  
                   more fierce.)<sup>2</sup>

Chapters 28 and 29 of George Washington Cable's The Grandissimes tell the story of Bras-Coupé, a former African voodoo prince forced into slavery. Cable underscores the potential strength of Bras-Coupé's voodoo powers with a violent storm. In separate ceremonies, Don José Martinez weds a woman identified only as "Mademoiselle" by Cable, and Bras-Coupé marries Palmyra. Earlier, Palmyra had pleaded with "Mademoiselle" to intercede for her and prevent her marriage to Bras-Coupé. At

the conclusion of the ceremony, "the hurricane struck the dwelling."<sup>3</sup> Bras-Coupe' turns and asks for Palmyra, who has left his side. "Mademoiselle" tells him he will have to wait until she gives Palmyra to him. Bras-Coupe' agrees only because "Mademoiselle" tells him; however, if he is deceived, "Bras-Coupe' will call Voudou-Magnan" (Cable, p. 234) and curse the white man and his land. The potential danger of this threat to Martinez and his guests is suggested by the storm which strikes in all its fury at this precise moment: "The crowd retreated and the storm fell like a burst of infernal applause. A whiff like fifty witches floated up the canvas curtain of the gallery and a fierce black cloud, drawing the moon under its cloak, belched forth a stream of fire that seemed to flood the ground; a peal of thunder followed as if the sky had fallen in, the house quivered, the great oak groaned, and every lesser thing bowed down before the awful blast" (Cable, p. 234). Moments later, drunk from his first experience with wine, Bras-Coupe' appears in the grand salon and demands more wine. When Martinez refuses him, Bras-Coupe' strikes Martinez and, as promised, utters a curse. After he rushes from the room, the scene is illuminated by "an avalanche of lightning with Bras-Coupe' in the midst making for the swamp" (Cable, p. 236).

The libretto Koanga, by C. F. Keary and revised by Douglas Craig and Andrew Page, is based upon the Bras-Coupe' chapters in The Grandissimes. Throughout Act II, flashes of lightning and distant thunder suggest the approach of a storm which will increase in intensity reinforcing the growing wrath of Koanga. A double celebration is in progress. The whites in the plantation house celebrate the birthday of Don Jose Martinez, and the negroes outdoors prepare for the wedding of Koanga to Palmyra. Don



Jose has arranged to have his overseer Simon Perez prevent Palmyra's marriage by kidnapping her. When Koanga confronts Don Jose with his demand for Palmyra, Don Jose strikes him. When Koanga curses the owner and his land, the storm is at its most violent. "Thunder and darkness--Koanga alone on stage, advances and falls on his knees, with arms outstretched."<sup>4</sup> Afterwards, "Koanga is seen, by occasional flashes of lightning, making his way thro' the dense forest" (Craig and Page, p. 102). This storm reinforces the violent passions of Koanga as opposed to the storm in Hester which suggests the psychological disturbance in Arthur.

## II Symbol

The description of settings often goes beyond reinforcement of mood and functions as symbol. Hawthorne's use of darkness and light in The Scarlet Letter creates symbolic overtones in the forest setting. When Hester and Arthur meet in the forest, the setting is at first "dark," "dismal," and "gloomy." Later, when Hester removes the cloth letter from her dress and the two have decided to leave Boston, sunlight invades the darkness. Hawthorne establishes the symbolic correspondences: "And, as if the gloom of the earth and the sky had been but the effluence of those two mortal hearts, it vanished with their sorrow. All at once as with a smile from heaven, forth burst the sunshine . . ." (Hawthorne, pp. 202-03). The fluctuations of darkness and sunlight symbolize the emotions of Hester and Arthur.<sup>5</sup>

In the forest setting of Act II in The Scarlet Letter, George Parsons Lathrop's description of the lighting for the setting makes it clear that "sunlight alternates with deep shadow" (Lathrop, p. 19).

There is no specific indication in the stage directions or in the description itself that this forest setting is intended to be symbolic. However, there are frequent references in the text to the sunlight which illuminates scattered portions of the setting. Together with the text of the libretto, this stage lighting creates symbolic overtones similar in their effect to Hawthorne's use of light in Chapters XVI-XIX of The Scarlet Letter.

The opening words of the chorus in Act I immediately establish an association of Hester with darkness. To the chorus, the blackness of Hester's nature appears more sinful when contrasted with the glow of sin which shines from within her:

How boldly shines the sun!  
Yet outer darkness  
Enfolds yon wicked woman: while, within her,  
The wrong that she hath done  
Gleams bold as bale-fire 'gainst the light of day.<sup>6</sup>

In Act II, Lathrop, the son-in-law of Nathaniel Hawthorne, took care to have Hester and Arthur make numerous references to the contrasting light and darkness of the setting. Late in the Act, Hester, in the presence of Arthur, tears the letter from her dress and throws it away, paralleling her action in the novel. Arthur, observing the appearance of the sun, expresses ideas which parallel closely the symbolic meanings associated with light in the novel. His words are stage directions which signal the flooding of the stage with light as Act II closes on a note of optimism: "Thro' the forest the sunshine breaks / In a flood of radiance rolled" (Lathrop, p. 30). The lyrics at this point have begun to establish a set of analogies: one of darkness with sorrow and

anguish and another of light with hope, dreams, and the promise of a bright future.

And lingering shadows of olden sorrow,  
To follow the star of a golden morrow!  
The white sail gleams  
With a light of dreams;  
It beckons us on with gladdening hope,  
No more in anguish dark to grope. (Lathrop, p. 30)

By having his characters sing repeatedly of the relation of light to goodness and of darkness to sin and evil, Lathrop made a conscious effort to reproduce in his libretto the symbolic relationships in Hawthorne's novel. The lyrics and the lighting effects combine in this scene to give the setting a symbolic significance which it would otherwise lack.

In addition to these lighting effects in The Scarlet Letter, two other librettos, Hester and Merry Mount, contain stage directions for specific visual effects which carry symbolic significance. In a theatre with sophisticated stage machinery, almost any effect is possible. Often the librettist, the director, and the stage designer will work closely together to produce astonishing effects. In his libretto, Hester, Carlson uses stage machinery to create two symbolic effects. The first effect, suggested by the second scaffold scene in the novel when Arthur sees the letter "A" in the sky, occurs in Act IV. Left alone in the forest after Hester leaves, Arthur Dimmesdale is frightened by his new knowledge of Roger Chillingworth's evil nature. A violent storm approaches. Suddenly, Arthur sees a large "A" in the sky. In the back of the stage, the great "glaring 'A' appears in flames of fire among the clouds" (Carlson, p. 120). This flaming letter disappears and reappears throughout the

remainder of the scene. When Roger Chillingworth appears in the forest toward the end of the scene, there is no indication in the libretto that he sees the "A" in the sky. Since no other character in the opera refers to the appearance of the letter, the suggestion in the opera is that the "A" symbolizes the guilt haunting Dimmesdale. In Hawthorne's novel, the meaning of the "A" remains ambiguous. At first, Hawthorne imputes the vision of the letter "solely to the disease in his own eyes and heart, that the minister, looking upward to the zenith, beheld there the appearance of an immense letter--the letter A . . ." (Hawthorne, 155). Yet, the next day as the congregation leaves the church, a sexton inquires of Dimmesdale if he had seen the portent in the sky the night before, a "great red letter in the sky,--the letter A,--which we interpret to stand for Angel" (Hawthorne, p. 158). As Hawthorne explains, any person having seen the sign may have attributed to it his own sense of guilt. The "flaming A" has a wider symbolic application in the novel than it has in the libretto.

In Act V of Hester, Carlson requires a visual effect which has no precedent in the novel. Act V ends as Arthur dies in the arms of Hester. Looking heavenward, Hester sees Pearl, her dead child: "A vision appears in the white clouds revealing Hester's child as an angel granting heaven's forgiveness" (Carlson, p. 267). In both adaptations of the novel, the librettists have omitted Pearl from the main action of the story. However, it is important to note that Carlson's vision of Pearl as a symbol of forgiveness may have been suggested from a comment about her in Hawthorne's novel. A complex character, Pearl is, at one point,

described as a blessing to Hester; "God, as a direct consequence of the sin which man thus punished, had given her a lovely child, whose place was on that same dishonored bosom, to connect her parent for ever with the race and descent of mortals, and to be finally a blessed soul in heaven" (Hawthorne, p. 89).

In Hawthorne's short story "The Maypole of Merry Mount," the residents of Merry Mount gather to decorate the Maypole and to celebrate the wedding of the Lord and the Lady of the May, Edgar and Edith. Later, the celebration is interrupted and the Maypole destroyed by a group of Puritans, led by Endicott, the severest of the Puritans. At first threatened by the Puritans, Edgar and Edith are soon released to start their married life. The stark contrast between the lightedhearted pleasure seekers of Merry Mount and the grim Puritans symbolizes the theme: "life's idle pleasures" of which the residents of Merry Mount are the emblems must give "place to the sternest cares of life, personified by the dark puritans" (Hawthorne, Twice-Told Tales, p. 82).

In Merry Mount, Richard Stokes created two lavish scenes which require more sophisticated mechanical devices to produce than any other settings in the librettos studied. Together these scenes, "The Maypole" and "Bradford's Dream" symbolize the inner conflict of Bradford, the opera's hero. In Act II, i "The Maypole" a crowd of revelers gather to decorate the Maypole and to celebrate the wedding of the Lord and the Lady of the May, the Cavalier Gower Lackland and the Lady Marigold Sandys. Later, as in the story, the celebration is interrupted and the Maypole torn down by a band of Puritans. The scenic grandeur in ritual

actions and in elaborate costumes, suggestive of Hawthorne's story, intentionally parallels and prepares for Act II, iii "Bradford's Dream."

Act II, i opens with a group of women revelers twining ribbons around the Maypole, located in the center of the stage. When the decorations are completed, a lengthy procession of the Nine Worthies of old English<sup>7</sup> pageantry appears, announcing the appearance of the Lord of the May. As he takes his place on the throne, "flags break forth in an arch above Gower's head" (Stokes, p. 111). A scene follows, full of color and filled with characters in imaginative costumes, some of which were suggested by Hawthorne, e.g. "maskers in falseface with pendulous red noses and gaping lips" (Stokes, p. 111). These characters break into a wild dance around the Maypole. Following this ballet, Marigold Sandys, the Lady of the May, enters "costumed as the goddess of Spring, borne aloft in "a coach formed by thirty-six girls" (Stokes, p. 125) adding to the color and splendor of the scene. This scene is climaxed by the wedding ceremony, which is interrupted by Bradford and his band of Puritans.

Act II, iii, paralleling scene i, opens with a group of witches riding through the air on broomsticks. A minotaur climbs out of the earth and begins a dance. As in scene i, a lengthy procession takes place, this time consisting of monsters which announce Lucifer's entrance. As Lucifer ascends to his throne, "an arch of dusky, sullen flame leaps into place like a rainbow over his head" (Stokes, p. 181). The monsters begin a frantic dance around a giant toadstool. This on-stage machine, placed where the maypole had previously stood, "opens

its hood like a parasol and shines upon the throng a ghastly fluorescence" (Stokes, p. 193). At the parallel point when the Lady of the May entered in scene i, Astoreth, the consort of Lucifer sung by the same soprano who portrays Marigold Sandys, now appears. The object of Bradford's erotic fantasies, Astoreth persuades Bradford to sign a blood contract with Lucifer. Immediately after he signs his name, the monsters slink away, the toadstool "descends through the earth" (Stokes, p. 197), Lucifer and Astoreth leave together, and Bradford, asleep, is left alone.

The total scenic picture of setting, action, and characters in Bradford's troubled dream parallel those in "The Maypole." Psychologically Bradford associates the residents of Merry Mount and their heathen practices with the followers of Lucifer and their evil temptations. The conflict between Bradford's Puritan asceticism, which he views as good, and his physical attraction to Marigold Sandys, which he believes is evil, is symbolized scenically by the parallel contrasts in these two scenes.

In two librettos, Billy Budd and Owen Wingrave, the power of the lyrics alone invests the settings with symbolic stature. Through a series of analogies, Forster and Crozier, following Melville's hint, intend the setting to be a microcosm. In Chapter 13 of Billy Budd, Melville compares his story of conflicting passions to a drama. "Passion, and passion in its profoundest, is not a thing demanding a palatial stage whereon to play its part" (Melville, p. 78). The most monumental of human passions can be found "down among the groundlings, among the

beggars and rakers of the garbage" (Melville, p. 78). This theatrical analogy is completed when Melville compares the Bellipotent to a stage: "In the present instance the stage is a scrubbed gun deck . . ." (Melville, p. 79). Against this setting, the drama of Billy Budd with its elemental conflict of good and evil is told. Melville expands his image of the Bellipotent as a stage into a symbol of the man-of-war as a microcosm. For instance, Budd's impressment involved his transferral from the "simpler sphere" of the Rights-of-Man to the "more knowing world of a great warship" (Melville, p. 50). Moving from one mode of existence to another is analogous, in the novel, to being transplanted from the simplicity and innocence of the provinces to the complexity and intrigue of a royal court (Melville, p. 51).

In a production of the opera, the story of Billy Budd is acted on a stage made literally to represent the decks of the Indomitable. Various characters in the libretto describe the setting in terms which suggest it is to represent the larger world of men. Claggart, the first character to make this direct comparison, comments to himself that he has studied mankind. This larger experience has prepared him for a parallel activity in the smaller world of the Indomitable. Taking offense at his officer's order to watch Budd, Claggart asks himself sarcastically, "Have I never studied man and man's weaknesses? Have I not apprenticed myself to this hateful world, to this ship, accursed ship" (Forster and Crozier, p. 50). Claggart knows he is destined to destroy Budd and views his situation as analogous to similar positions in the larger world: "I am doomed to annihilate you. I am vowed to your destruction. I will wipe you off the face of the earth! Off this tiny floating fragment of earth . . ."



(Forster and Crozier, pp. 136-37). Captain Vere extends this analogy. After the court-martial, Vere comments upon his position as head of the ship's realm: "Death is the penalty for those who break the laws of earth, and I who am king of this fragment of earth, of this floating monarchy, have exacted death" (Forster and Crozier, pp. 290-91). As in the libretto The Scarlet Letter in which characters' dialogue identifies the symbolic function of the forest, Forster and Crozier use the words of Claggart and Vere to make the Indomitable a microcosm.

At the close of Chapter 21, following the arguments of the drumhead court, the narrator of Billy Budd comments upon the distinction between the actions and decisions of individuals directly involved in emergency situations and the rational judgments passed of those viewing the situation in retrospect. The person participating in the immediate situation often is forced to act, if not totally upon impulse, from a limited vantage point. These emergency situations can involve decisions both of a practical and of a moral nature. The man involved in this type of situation is like a pilot whose ship must sail through thick fog. The view of the man on the bridge is greatly hampered by the fog, while men below deck have little, if any, true understanding of the captain's responsibilities. "The greater the fog the more it imperils the steamer, and speed is put on though at the hazard of running somebody down. Little ween the snug card player in the cabin of the responsibilities of the man on the bridge" (Melville, p. 114).

Forster and Crozier seize upon this image of the fog as a barrier to true vision. In their libretto, fog becomes sea mists which at first literally appear on the stage and then later are referred to figuratively

by several characters. In all of the references to them the mists literally impair clear physical vision and figuratively block true insight. Those moments during which the mists rise symbolize clear vision, both physical and mental. In Chapter 18 of the novel, a brief encounter by the Bellipotent with an enemy ship is dismissed in four sentences. The crew pursues the enemy frigate which eventually manages to elude the Bellipotent. This short passage becomes an important scene in the opera. At the opening of Act II, the scene is the quarter-deck and "the air is grey with mist" (p. 171). Later, when an enemy ship is sighted, "the mists begin to lift . . ." (Forster and Crozier, p. 176). The first comment made by the sailors is their delight at having an unobstructed view of their enemy: "By God, the French! And the mist is gone" (Forster and Crozier, pp. 176-177). When the Indomitable fires on the enemy, the shot falls short and the French vessel escapes into the distant mist. Vere comments upon this: "Ay, the mist is back to foil us. The mist creeps in to blind us. Our chase is foolish . . ." (Forster and Crozier, p. 218). To this point references have been to the literal sea mists which have impaired physical vision. After ordering Budd to be brought to his cabin to face Claggart, Captain Vere begins to think of the mists in figurative terms. The mists become the source for interior as well as exterior problems: "Disappointment, vexation, ev'rywhere, creeping over ev'rything, confusing ev'ryone. Confusion without and within" (Forster and Crozier, p. 238). Later in his cabin, Vere considers his situation. He understands that Claggart is evil and is set on destroying Budd. Vere believes the situation is clear: "The mists are vanishing," (Forster and Crozier, p. 244) he says. Claggart will fail since one

person, Vere, is "not so easily deceived" (Forster and Crozier, p. 245). In this scene Vere is optimistic that he can prevent any problem since he clearly understands the relation of the two men. However, immediately following Claggart's death, Vere discovers he was mistaken. The truth of the matter is now clear. What he believed to have been true insight into the matter earlier proves with Claggart's death to be false. He believed the symbolic mists had risen and permitted him a full understanding. With Claggart lying dead on his cabin floor and with Budd standing quietly by, Vere now sees the situation in its true light. "The mists concealed all, all," (Forster and Crozier, p. 261) Vere sings. The horror of the truth clearly revealed to Vere, symbolized by the clearing of the figurative mists, is that he is to be the judge of Budd's action and the destroyer of the innocent Billy, not Claggart. He views the trial as his own. "It is not his trial, it is mine, mine, mine . . ." (Forster and Crozier, p. 263).

Lyrics are used by Myfanwy Piper to create a symbolic setting in Owen Wingrave, based on James's short story. The dramatic situation is the same in the libretto as in the story. Owen, the youngest male member of British family with a distinguished military history, rebels against following this tradition. Owen is ordered to Paramore, the family ancestral home, where he will be straightened out. The setting in both the story and the libretto becomes a battlefield. The house is described twice in the story as "military" and the characters are often referred to as soldiers. Owen's instructor identifies Owen as a soldier and implies that the battlefield is the house: "Oh, you are a soldier; you must fight it out!"<sup>8</sup> Jane Wingrave "represents the might, she

represents the tradition and the exploits of the British army" (James, p. 17). On a dare from Kate Julian, a girl Owen loves, he plans to spend the night in a room believed to be haunted by an ancestor. What occurs inside the room is never explained, but it is the cause of Owen's death. The last sentence of the story again equates Owen to a soldier and the setting to a battlefield: "He looked like a young soldier on a battlefield" (James, p. 51).

In the libretto, Owen views his position at Paramore as that of a god soldier entering battle. "How strange! Here in my own house I stand an enemy" (Piper, p. 15). The images increase in number as the opera continues. Owen pictures himself engaged in a battle in which he is surrounded by sacred family traditions, symbolized in part by the portraits of family military heroes which hang on the walls of the house. Words are the artillery of the enemy:

I'm in a state of seige;  
 bombarded with horrible words,  
 blockaded by the past,  
 starved by lack of love.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, the house is symbolic of a number of concepts, of traditional values defended by all members of the Wingrave family but Owen. He openly rebels against these. In Act I, v described as "abstract," members of the family are shown over a period of a week bombarding Owen with the real meaning of his denial of their cherished values. Owen's duty as seen by his family is clearly to accept the traditional values of military service of all its members. Owen's denial of these concepts constitutes a treasonable act. To rebel against the House of Paramore is tantamount to treason against all the ideals which it represents, including England.

### III Tableau

Another important use of stage setting is to aid in providing an effective stage picture or tableau. "Enormously popular in the French theatre at the end of the eighteenth century and during the first half of the nineteenth century" (Smith, p. 189), tableaux were traditionally reserved for the climactic scenes. In opera, these scenes are represented musically by aria, a cavatina, or a large concerted ensemble of soloists and chorus. An audience anticipates these musically climactic moments. One function of the tableau is to enhance the effect of the musical climax by duplicating "on a visual scale the setpiece of the ballad, cavatina, or ensemble" (Smith, p. 223). Act II of Donizetti's Lucia di Lammermoor closes with a famous operatic tableau. Lucia, having just been forced to sign a contract wedding her to Lord Bucklaw, is shocked by the unexpected return of her lover Edgardo. Her brother Enrico and Adgardo start to unsheath their swords but change their minds. Suddenly, both the dramatic action and the music stop. After a few seconds, the orchestra introduces the famous sextet. This tableau of the interrupted wedding ceremony is maintained throughout the singing of the ensemble, after which Edgardo rushes from the hall. In addition to these artistic effects, tableaux, as Smith point out, "were splendidly calculated to generate applause" (Smith, p. 189).

Wainwright's Rip Van Winkle is the only libretto among those studied to give specific instructions for the use of tableaux. Careful attention was given to the scenery for the first performance of this opera on September 27, 1855. For authenticity the scenic designer prepared scenery that represented the actual locale of the story in the mountains

along the Hudson River. The credit page of the libretto explains that the scenery was "painted from Nature, drawings for the express purpose having been taken on the spot" (Wainwright, p. 3). The four tableaux are presented in Act I and are "after the celebrated etchings of 'Rip Van Winkle' by E. O. C. Darley" (Wainwright, p. 3). In addition to the values of presenting a striking stage picture and of providing visual support to climactic moments, these tableaux offered additional pleasure by presenting scenes already familiar to the audience from an early edition of Irving's tale.

Two tableaux, the first and the fourth, occur at moments in Act I when Rip sings songs in honor of drinking. Early in the act Rip's village and friends urge him to sing. Rip, Nicholas the landlord of the inn, Derrick Van Bummel, the schoolmaster, and numerous villagers gathered in front of the inn make up the tableau. In the fourth tableau of the act set in the Catskill Mountains Rip sings for Hendrick Hudson and his men to add to the mirth of the group as they play ninepins. In Act I, iii the second and the third tableaux are set. These present pictures of Rip's domestic life. The second tableau is not related to any musical moment. The setting is the interior of Rip's house and the tableau involves Rip, Dame Van Winkle, a village maiden Anna, and Rip's children Alice and Young Rip. The third tableau at the close of this same scene precedes a duet for Rip and his wife. The tableau presents the four members of the Van Winkle family. Rip and his wife quarrel, and Rip threatens to leave. Alice pleads with her father to stay while young Rip begs to be allowed to go with him. The duet is a single peaceful moment when Rip and his wife sing of how pleasant their life together could be if Rip would live more as Dame Van Winkle wishes.

The tableau operas of the nineteenth century, according to Smith, had great influence on the development of the libretto. With increasing emphasis placed on the tableau for theatrical effect, the story line of these librettos was condensed into a series of loosely connected grand scenes. This disjunctive approach to dramatic presentation emphasized scenic grandeur and variety rather than the presentation of a continuous story line. Consequently, the tableau and its accompanying disjunctive story line become prominent features of the French Grand Opera, providing its creators with the maximum opportunity for scenic effectiveness through variety and large scale production.

The influence of the tableau upon scenic structure can be seen in a twentieth-century libretto, Wozzeck, by Alban Berg, one of the most highly praised and most frequently produced operas of this century. The original play by Georg Buchner consists of Twenty-five loosely connected scenes. To tell this story of the existential anguish and mental deterioration of Wozzeck, Berg selected fifteen scenes from the play. The result was a series of scenes even more loosely connected dramatically than they had been in the original play. The problem of unification of these scenes was, in Berg's own words, "more musical than literary, and had to be solved by the laws of musical structure rather than by the rules of dramaturgy."<sup>10</sup> According to Patrick Smith, who suggests the term "snapshot scenes" for the units in such a libretto as Wozzeck, this hallmark of the twentieth-century libretto gives an emphasis to the disjunctive rather than the continuous presentation of the story. This type of libretto has a structure similar to, but more compact than that of the nineteenth-century Grand Opera.

The sixteen scenes in Myfanwy Piper's The Turn of the Screw present this disjunctive structure. Fifteen scenes were adapted from James's novella, which has twenty-four chapters. The idea of presenting a multiplicity of short scenes originated with the composer, Benjamin Britten. The selection of the scenes was "dictated by a careful analysis of the text."<sup>11</sup> According to the librettist, the chief concern in transforming these scenes from the novella to the stage was presentation of detail. "What had to be invented was neither sequence nor fact, but detail" (Piper, p. 80). The effect of these separated "snapshot scenes" was to present an accumulative series of details which when viewed collectively would accomplish several purposes. "Each scene was then planned to carry the drama one step further, and at the same time . . . to show some aspect of their (the residents of Bly) daily life. In this way some indication of the passage of time could be given without holding up the action" (Piper, p. 81).

Although sequence was not of primary concern to the librettist, the question of unity had to have been. Musically, the scenes are linked by orchestral interludes called "Variations." Dramatically, they are linked by the scenic details chosen by the librettist for presentation. These details were suggested by James's story, and they are also seen in the stage settings of the opera. The librettist writes, "And even for detail there was more often than not some hint somewhere in the text that could serve as a starting point" (Piper, p. 80). The unifying details appear in the libretto as the titles for the scenes, like chapters in a book: "The Tower," "The Lake," "The Window," and so forth. Each scene in the opera concerns a single event in the story and also presents an added element of the setting which was not present in the previous scenes.



Thirteen of the sixteen scenes take place on the grounds of Bly. Eleven scenes are set in the house itself. For instance, Act I, scene ii--"The Welcome"--is set on the porch of Bly. Scene iii entitled "The Letter" again is set on the porch but not the window is included as an additional detail. Scene iv--"The Tower"--once again reveals the porch; however, in addition to the window, the tower of the house is now visible. In this scene, the Governess first sees Quint. Each succeeding scene unifies this disjunctive presentation of events in two ways. First, the movement from one scene to the next allows the action to flow with a minimum of interruption. Secondly, this multiplicity of scenes reinforces "the impression (so powerfully conveyed in James's story) that the action covered a considerable period of time and that there were long stretches of normality between the occasional supernatural appearances of the phantoms."<sup>12</sup>

Through the use of stage machinery and lyrics, a librettist often endows his settings with two special functions. Storm scenes produced through simple sound effects and stage lighting were used in three librettos to parallel the inner turmoil of the characters. Elaborate staging, i.e. the contrasting scenes in Merry Mount each with parallel visual effects, created symbolic correspondences unstated in the libretto. Likewise, lyrics, i.e. the figurative language in Billy Budd which establishes correspondences between visual clarity and intellectual understanding, often endow the setting with symbolic significance. In addition to these two purposes, operatic settings are often part of a tableau. The contribution of this use of setting has been

two-fold: to create effective stage pictures and to affect the scenic structure of librettos.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>"It was a Venice all of evil that had broken out for them alike, so that they were together in their anxiety, if they really could have met on it; a Venice of cold lashing rain from a black sky, of wicked wind raging through narrow passages." Henry James, The Wings of the Dove, Vol. II (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909), p. 123.

<sup>2</sup>Charles Frederick Carlson, Hester, a microfilm (Chicago: Newberry Library, 1958), pp. 209-10.

<sup>3</sup>George Washington Cable, The Grandissimes (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1891), p. 234.

<sup>4</sup>C. F. Keary, Koanga, revised English libretto by Douglas Craig and Andrew Page (London: Hawkes & Son Ltd., 1935, 1974), p. 100.

<sup>5</sup>Hawthorne equates the sunlight which dispells the gloom of the forest setting to the love which, momentarily at least, replaces the despair in the hearts of Hester and Arthur. See also Richard Fogle's Hawthorne's Fiction: The Light and the Dark (Norman: The University of Oklahoma Press, 1964), p. 134 in which the light is symbolic of hope.

<sup>6</sup>George Parsons Lathrop, The Scarlet Letter, A Dramatic Poem (1895), p. 1.

<sup>7</sup>Richard Stokes, Merry Mount (New York: Harms, Inc., 1933), p. III. The librettist identifies these characters in his synopsis: Joshua, David, Hector of Troy, Alexander the Great, Judas Macabaeus, Julius Caesar, King Arthur, Charlemagne, and Duke of Godefroy of Bologne.

<sup>8</sup>The Complete Tales of Henry James, ed. Leon Edel 9 (New York: J. P. Lippincott Company, 1964), 35.

<sup>9</sup>Myfanwy Piper, Owen Wingrave (London: Faber Music Limited, 1971), p. 21.

<sup>10</sup>Alban Berg, "A Word about Wozzeck," in The Essence of Opera (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1969), p. 315.

<sup>11</sup>Myfanwy Piper, "Some Thoughts on the Libretto The Turn of the Screw," Tribute to Benjamin Britten, ed. Anthony Gishford (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), p. 30.

<sup>12</sup>Eric Walter White, Benjamin Britten, His Life and His Operas (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), p. 178. Hereafter cited as His Life and His Operas.

### CHAPTER THREE CHARACTERIZATION: OBSERVABLE TRAITS

E. M. Forster, paraphrasing the French literary critic Alain asserts that each man has two sides: the physical and the psychological. The physical traits consist of "all that is observable in man--that is to say his actions and such spiritual existence as can be deduced from his actions. . . ." <sup>1</sup> The use of observable character traits to portray characters is common to both drama and fiction. In addition to the actions performed by characters, physical details often can reveal aspects of character, like the physical beauty of Billy Budd and the impediment of his vocal stammer which are emphasized by Melville in his novel. Physical objects associated with a person will often reveal character traits. These may be items chosen by a character such as the clothing of Catherine Sloper in James's Washington Square, or they may be objects relating to the character independent of his choosing, such as the scarlet letter worn by Hester Prynne. We can begin with a discussion of action as it affects characterization.

#### I Actions

Three types of actions are usually specified in a libretto: repeated actions, startling or unexpected actions, and symbolic actions. In adapting a fictional work, a librettist will often borrow all three types of actions directly from the source material. In two librettos, Hester and The Scarlet Letter, each librettist specified a repeated action found in Hawthorne's novel. Dimmesdale appears repeatedly in the

novel with his hand over his heart. Leland Schubert traced Hawthorne's repetition of this action, intended to suggest Dimmesdale's inner guilt and remorse, and found it appears "on thirty different pages of the book."<sup>2</sup> Unlike the numerous repetitions in the novel, Dimmesdale performs the action only twice in the libretto. Leaning over a balcony, Dimmesdale appeals to Hester to reveal the identity of the father of her child. When she refuses, Dimmesdale "sinks back, exhausted, with his hand over his heart" (Lathrop, p. 10). This action is repeated just before Dimmesdale enters the Meeting House for worship. He "turns away with bowed head, his hand clutching his breast . . ." (Lathrop, p. 15). Schubert qualifies his praise of Hawthorne's use of this motif by pointing to the essential weakness in any often repeated device: "It becomes monotonous" (Schubert, p. 146). But in Lathrop's adaptation, because Dimmesdale's action is specified by the librettist only twice, its effectiveness is weakened.

The reverse of Lathrop's sparse use of repeated actions is seen in Forster and Crozier's Billy Budd. The librettists place much more emphasis on Budd's stammer than does Melville. Budd's inability to speak under certain instances of stress is dramatized twice in Melville's version: first, when the afterguardsman tempts Budd to mutiny and second, when Claggart accuses Budd of mutiny. In the Prologue to the opera, Vere mentions this flaw in Budd: "There is always some flaw in it, some defect, some imperfection in the divine image, some fault in the angelic song, some stammer in the divine speech" (Forster and Crozier, pp. 3-4). At this early point in the opera, Britten, the composer, introduces an arpeggio in the orchestra which will appear throughout

the opera as a leitmotif in association with Budd's stammer:



(Britten, p. 3)

This leitmotif suggests a message which Budd is unable to relate when he discovers Squeak, Claggart's lackey, meddling in his belongings and again when a novice (the afterguardsman in the novel) attempts to bribe him into a false mutiny plot. The final occurrence of Budd's stammer is in the accusation scene which in the novel is entirely descriptive with the exception of Vere's plea for Budd to speak. The parallel scene in the opera is underscored by the stammer motif which serves both as a reminiscent theme and as an anticipatory theme. While recalling the previous incidents when Budd could not respond, the motif now creates a degree of suspense through anticipation. Appearing at closer intervals which become more insistent in their impact, the arpeggios suggest Budd's increasing agitation. Finally, at the moment of dramatic climax when Budd shouts "Devil" as he strikes and kills Claggart, the orchestra stops. The stammer motif does not appear again after this incident. The increased emphasis on Budd's stammer enhanced by Britten's musical characterization creates an emotional tension in the opera which does not exist in Melville's novel.

When Budd is unable to defend himself against Claggart's charge of mutiny, he responds with a violent action which startles both Vere and the audience. Characterization through the performance of violent or unexpected actions is common to successful operatic dramaturgy. For W. H. Auden, this immediate active quality is necessary in operatic characterization because "music is immediate actuality and neither potentiality nor passivity can live in its presence."<sup>3</sup> This passionate active state is the "quality common to all great operatic roles, e.g. Don Giovanni, Norma, Lucia, Tristan, Isolde, Brunnhilde" (Auden, p. 356). All sixteen of the librettos under discussion portray characters through startling actions. In eleven librettos these actions occur with little or no change from the source material. Characters in the five remaining librettos perform startling actions which, in each instance, introduce some alteration in the original story. The most extensive change occurs in Stokes's Merry Mount. Wrestling Bradford, who does not appear at all in Hawthorne's story, is the spiritual leader of the puritan New England colony. In the course of the opera, he performs a series of startling actions--a compact with the devil, a demonic curse against the colony, the murder of the beautiful young Marigold Sandys, and his suicide by immolation. Taken together these actions reveal a religious leader who has been converted into a full-blown Satanist. His total surrender to the physical attraction of Marigold Sandys is more than self-destructive; because he fails to exert any control over his passions, Bradford's self-indulgence ultimately results in the destruction of the entire settlement. None of this, it should be remembered, is in the original story.

In Melville's short story, "The Bell Tower," Bannadonna designs and erects a combination bell tower and clock tower. On the giant bell designed for the tower are twelve figures of young girls, each clasping hands. Una, the figure representing the first hour, holds the hand of Dua and so on. The size of the fire necessary to forge this bell so frightens the workmen that they refuse to perform their duty. To prevent failure of this final casting, Bannadonna strikes and kills the anonymous individual among his men. The others immediately return to their duties. In Ernst Krenek's libretto, the murdered man is identified as Giovanni, Bannadonna's foreman and the father of Una. Unlike the figure in Melville's story, Una is a human being who falls in love with Bannadonna. The only female character in the opera, Una was added to the libretto for musical and dramatic reasons. Musically, she supplies the opera with vocal variety, a quality which many librettists and composers believe necessary in an operatic score. Dramatically, the introduction of Una produces two effects. First, she provides a love interest which the original story lacks. More importantly, Una, as a living creature, contributes to a characterization of Bannadonna different from that created by Melville. When she realizes that Bannadonna has betrayed her, Una attempts to kill him but fails. In retaliation, Bannadonna performs a feat of magic not attributed to him in the short story. By an ancient and mysterious Chinese technique involving hypnotism and a chemical formula, Bannadonna transforms Una into a metallic figure. This startling action reveals Bannadonna as a magician and a conjurer. In Melville, Bannadonna is a "practical materialist" who would never rely on "psychological and chemical



inductions, to arrive at a knowledge of the source of life. . . ." What he strove to accomplish as an artist "was to have been reached, not by logic, not by crucible, not by conjuration, not by altars; but by plain vice-bench and hammer."<sup>4</sup>

In the preface to Percy MacKaye's free adaptation of Rip Van Winkle, the librettist warns that any "reader, or spectator, who may compare this work with the story of Washington Irving or the play by Joseph Jefferson, will discover more differences than resemblances."<sup>5</sup> Rip, a bachelor engaged to the shrewish Katrina Vedder, goes to the mountains and falls asleep. In this adaptation, Rip is changed from a henpecked husband who rebels against his shrewish wife into an enamored young man who believes he is in love. In Irving's tale, Rip acts independently of any outside control. He leaves his wife when she refuses to allow his dog into the house. In MacKaye's operatic version, Rip leaves the village to satisfy the demands of his shrewish fiancée. His return is watched over by Hendrick Hudson and his crew who wish to see him marry Peterkee, Katrina's younger sister. This supernatural intervention by Hudson and his crew produces two results. First, the success of their plan is ensured. Their supernatural powers will exert a control over the destinies of the human characters. Secondly, Rip is changed from a character whose actions form the plot into a figure who is controlled by the demands of the plot itself.

The librettos of The Scarlet Letter and The Turn of the Screw both present characters through startling actions which have no parallel in the fictional sources. Lathrop's advice in his "Introductory

Note" that "new incidents and moods are introduced" (Lathrop, n.p.), does not prepare the reader of his libretto for Hester's ultimate act of suicide. In the novel, Hester admits to Chillingworth that she has considered death. "'I have thought of death,' she said,--'have wished for it,--would have prayed for it . . .'" (Hawthorne, p. 56). Yet, she never actively pursues this course of action. In Act I of the libretto, a parallel interview between Hester and Chillingworth takes place, during which Hester asks about the nature of a phial of medicine: "Will it bring me death?/ Then gladly I drink it,/ To win release" (Lathrop, p. 16). Here Hester, unlike Hawthorne's heroine, drinks the potion unhesitatingly. Lathrop's characterization changes Hawthorne's strong, intelligent woman into an impulsive, emotional heroine. She becomes a typical operatic character acting emotionally on the demands of the moment with little forethought. This portrait of Hester illustrates what Patrick Smith describes as a key to nineteenth-century Romanticism: "The first, and probably--in a breakthrough sense,--the most important, change in the libretto was that involving the idea of death. The death of the hero or the heroine . . . was the hallmark of the Romantic Age (in opera) . . ." (Smith, pp. 195-96). Hester's death is contrived to satisfy a contemporary, romantic theatrical convention.

Perhaps the most problematic characters in terms of successful adaptation to the stage are the apparitions Quint and Miss Jessel in James's The Turn of the Screw. James, in at least one respect, had an advantage over Britten and his librettist, Myfawny Piper. Working with the reader's imagination, James could make the reality of the ghosts

ambiguous. At the end of the story, the reader could only question whether the ghosts ever really existed outside the Governess's imagination. James believed that any direct statements concerning the motives of the ghosts would weaken the nature of evil he hoped to convey. His own method, as expressed in his "Preface,"<sup>6</sup> was to present the ghosts through shadowy innuendo.

In adapting Quint and Miss Jessel for the stage, Britten and Piper either had to make them appear on stage, visible to the audience as they are to the Governess, or to suggest their invisible nature through some effect resulting from it. According to George Martin, "the latter course would have meant abandoning the crux of James's story rather than losing only its final subtlety. . . ." <sup>7</sup> In the libretto, the ambiguous nature of Quint and Miss Jessel is sacrificed. The audience, like the Governess, sees them. However, two questions central to the mystery in James's story are retained. First, it is not entirely clear in the libretto which of the other characters see the apparitions. Second, the motives of Quint and Miss Jessel remain sufficiently hazy and, as James would have it, suggestive of their evil presence and intentions. Through musical characterization Britten achieves effects possible only in opera. George Martin explains, "What Britten may have lost in ambiguity he gained in other respects with sound, a resource unavailable to James" ("Another Turn," p. 7). For example, Quint always appears to the unearthly sound of the celesta while Miss Jessel appears to the hushed tremor of a gong. Their musical characterizations are much more complex than this obvious association

with orchestral instruments suggests. The supernatural appearances of Quint and Miss Jessel are associated throughout the opera "with flat keys and flattened notes . . ." (White, His Life and His Operas, pp. 181-82). Quint's first appearance is accompanied by a surprising E flat major chord on the celesta in a predominant tonality of D major.

26 Quint becomes visible on the tower.

- re-ene.

Celesta

p.

f.

(Britten, p. 37)

Miss Jessel, as Eric White notices, "is not so strongly characterized as Quint. Her appearances are frequently underpinned by a sombre, brooding slowly spread chord" (White, His Life and His Operas, p. 182).

mf

Timp.

Gong

(Britten, p. 77)

This arpeggio culminates in the characteristic E flat, associated with the supernatural world. The most interesting and complex musical characterizations occur in the final scene during the confrontation between the Governess and Quint. The key signature is A major. However, the tonality of the music sung by the Governess and Miles fluctuates, beginning in E major. Also a ground bass figure appears in the orchestra at this point which will later be associated with the Governess's strength in combatting the power of Quint.

The image shows a musical score for a vocal part and piano accompaniment. The vocal part is for the Governess (Gov.) and is written in treble clef with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The lyrics are "O Miles I cannot bear to lose you." The piano accompaniment is in grand staff (treble and bass clefs) with a key signature of two sharps. It includes a ground bass figure in the left hand, marked with a forte (f) dynamic. The right hand has a melodic line. The piano part is marked with a piano (pp) dynamic and includes the instruction "Harp, D.C. (pizz.) Harp". The score is labeled "(with Ed.)" at the bottom.

(Britten, p. 184)

Quint's appearance in this scene is announced when he is heard calling Miles. In contrast to the major tonality of the Governess's music, Quint begins on the characteristic E flat.

The image shows a musical score for Quint's call "Miles!". It is written in treble clef with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The melody is a short, rising phrase that ends on a half note. The lyrics are "Miles!".

(Britten, p. 187)

The final struggle between the wills of the Governess and Quint is characterized in the meters, the key signatures, and the tonalities of the music. The Governess's music is in  $\frac{2}{8}$  meter. The tonality of her music is a strong A major. Quint's music, indicated as  $\frac{3}{8}$  meter, is in A flat major, creating a jarring dissonance. The Governess has the upper hand in this struggle. This is characterized in the music by the fact that the meter and the key signature of the firm ground bass in the orchestra correspond to those of the Governess's music. In addition, she duplicates this strong melody of the ground bass, as opposed to the light, florid passage sung by Quint.

Although Miles does not sing at any point during this dramatic and musical struggle between the Governess and Quint, Britten carefully assigned to him a most curious key signature and meter. Mile's key signature is that of the Governess, and his meter is that of Quint. Musically, as well as dramatically, Miles is characterized as the center of the conflict.



(Britten, p. 192)

Seven measures before Miles shouts, "Peter Quint, you devil!", the music indicates that Quint's hold on the situation is weakening. His key signature changes abruptly to that of the Governess, and his vocal line now consists of an insecure F sharp and G against the Governess's solid C and G. Struggling, Quint is slowly being brought under her dominance. After Miles shouts the apparition's name, Quint sings in unison with the Governess as he admits defeat. Immediately following this passage in unison, Quint's farewell to Miles musically characterizes his final submission and defeat. The familiar tune, begun on E flat in all previous appearances, now begins on E natural.



(Britten, p. 195)

Four librettos studied use symbolic actions to characterize. As we have seen in Merry Mount, the actions of the pagan characters in "The Maypole" and their demonic counterparts in "The Hellish Rendezvous" present symbolically the psychological conflict of Wrestling Bradford. In his libretto The Wings of the Dove, Ethan Ayer uses pantomime, a second type of symbolic action, to reveal the character of Miles Dunster. The scene, while entirely original, may have been suggested by a passage in James's novel. Soon after her arrival in Venice, Milly hosts a dinner party at the Palazzo Leporelli. Merton Densher

learns from Susan Stringham that he is to be included in an entertainment to be presented.

"Oh that, of course, Why, we're to have music -- beautiful instruments and songs; and not Tasso declaimed as in the guide-books either. She has arranged it-- or at least, I have. That is Eugenio has. Besides. you're in the picture."(James, II, 207)

In the libretto, the entertainment arranged by the servant Giuliano is actually performed for Milly, Miles Dunster, and Susan Stringham.

While a minstrel sings the simple story of betrayal, two other characters Janus and a maiden "pantomime the action appropriate to the verse in stylized motion" (Ayer, p. 105). Janus "carries a staff with two masks, one representing spring, the other winter" (Ayer, p. 105). To win the love of the young maiden, Janus presents his youthful face to her. After she has surrendered, he turns his winter face toward her. This pantomime symbolizes Miles's deceitful relation to Milly. He is involved with Kate Croy in a plot to win Milly's love and to marry her. Their plan will be completed upon Milly's anticipated death when Miles inherits Milly's fortune, enabling him to marry Kate. Suspecting Miles's motives, Giuliano closely watches Miles during the performance of the masque to detect any indication of guilt in his reaction. The masque produces the expected results: "Miles is disturbed and angry" (Ayer, p. 108).

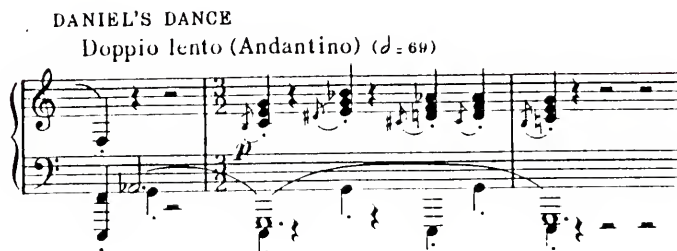
The masque was inserted into the libretto for more than theatrical effect. The idea of a play-within-a-play to expose hidden characteristics and motives is a time-honored theatrical convention. As Patrick Smith explains, "it results when someone else stands between the audience and what is happening on stage . . . while being watched by the audience"



(Smith, p. 276). This technique produces in The Wings of the Dove a degree of dramatic irony. While Miles reacts unfavorably to the masque and may even suspect Giuliano's intentions, the final meaning of the masque in relation to Miles and the results it produces in him are all completely clear to the audience.

In two other librettos, music functions in conjunction with the pantomime and the words of characters on stage to symbolize, in the first instance, an on-stage action that is never performed and, in the second instance, an off-stage action that is never seen. In Jean Karsavina's The Jumping Frog of Calaveras County, the frog never appears on stage. Any action performed by the frog in Twain's story is described by Simon Wheeler, the narrator. In the libretto, all actions of the frog are symbolized through the music in the orchestra and in the words sung and the pantomime performed by the individual characters and the chorus. The pantomime involved here serves a different purpose than that in The Masque of Janus. The latter related mainly to character. In The Jumping Frog of Calaveras County, the pantomime serves the dual purpose usually associated with this sort of stage action: "stage movement synchronized with music can be a useful and effective tool in narration and in establishing the personalities of their various characters" (Hamm, p. 189). Special music characterizes Daniel Webster, the celebrated frog. When Smiley places Daniel on the barroom floor, Lulu and Uncle Henry watch as the frog performs a number of extraordinary leaps. The following dance, however, with its solid staccato notes and jerky, irregular movement symbolizes the movements of Daniel. The pantomime, synchronized to the music and performed by the three characters,

must both portray their astonishment and pride in Daniel's accomplishment and suggest the dimensions of this ability.



(Karsavina, p. 27)

Pantomime and a noticeable absence of music symbolize Daniel's actions in the jumping contest. When the frogs are placed on the starting line and the people shout, "Go!," the music stops. This dramatic use of silence and the accompanying pantomime by the various characters and the chorus, symbolize Daniel's inability to jump and the total amazement of the miners. The Stranger's frog makes a few small jumps suggested by the weak intermittent chords.



(Karsavina, p. 111)

By contrast with the first use of music and pantomime which chiefly characterized Daniel's jumping ability, this second use of these two devices is primarily narrative. The jumping contest, the climax of the story, is symbolized through pantomime and the significant lack of music.

Stephen Vincent Benét planned a different type of pantomime for The Headless Horseman. To stage a chase even remotely resembling the one described by Irving in "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" would present insurmountable problems. Because his libretto was written with amateur performers in mind, Benét simplified the actions of the Headless Horseman through the use of a type of melodrama. David Ewen defines this form of melodrama as "an operatic passage or scene in which the singer recites his part while a musical commentary on the situation appears in the orchestral accompaniment."<sup>8</sup> Examples of such melodrama are the bullet-casting scene in Der Freischütz, Lady Macbeth's letter-reading scene in Macbeth, and the grave-digging scene in Fidelio.

In Benét's libretto, the melodrama begins as Van Tassel prepares to deliver a speech in honor of the betrothal of his daughter Katrina to Ichabod Crane. Various characters comment on the strange noises outside. At first the music parallels Van Tassel's festive mood. The key is a bright A major, the meter is a square  $\frac{2}{4}$ , and the tempo marking is a relaxed Allegretto. When he is interrupted, the music changes character by modulating to a gloomy G minor. The meter becomes a flowing  $\frac{6}{8}$ , and the tempo increases to Allegro. The music alternates in this manner until Van Tassel and his guests are startled when the "Phantoms yell" (Benét, p. 107). At this point, the music changes for the final

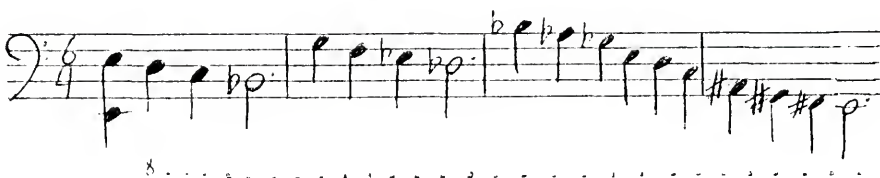
time. Slowly increasing in volume, the music portrays the approach of the Headless Horseman and the increasing apprehension of the characters on stage. The music stops at the moment when a knock is heard at the door. As the door suddenly opens, the Headless Horseman enters, chases Ichabod Crane across the room and out the window, and throws a pumpkin after him. These various pantomimes with the accompanying music are very appropriate to the librettos in which they are used. Neither action, the jumping of a frog or the chase on horseback, could successfully be staged. Pantomime and music can suggest both. However, in these instances, the result of having to present the actions in this manner is to weaken their effect. First, in the case of Daniel Webster, the attempt to represent an action without the presence of the central character seems anti-dramatic. Second, the chase of Ichabod Crane by the Headless Horseman is reduced to slapstick comedy when transferred to an indoor confrontation.

## II Physical Traits

Physical appearance is a second observable trait used by an author to characterize. A novelist or a short story writer will often present physical characteristics through lengthy descriptive passages. Details of the most minute physical qualities can be presented. In Billy Budd, for instance, Melville describes Budd's unique and beautiful physical features which contribute to the mystery surrounding his origin: The ear, small and shapely, the arch of the foot, the curve in the mouth and nostril, even the indurated hand dyed to the orange-tawney of the Toucan's

bill, a hand telling alike of the halyards and tar bucket . . . indicated a lineage in direct contradiction to his lot" (Melville, p. 51). This detailed physical description, impossible to a librettist, is in sharp contrast to the passing mention made by Melville of another feature of his sailor. Billy Budd sings. Melville suggests the quality of Budd's musical abilities by comparing his singing to that of the most beautiful of songbirds: "He was illiterate; he could not read, but he could sing, and like the illiterate nightingale was sometimes the composer of his own song" (Melville, p. 52). In the opera this physical characteristic is fully exploited by Britten and his librettists. Assigned the opera's most beautiful melodies, Budd sings and sings magnificently. While he cannot hope to achieve the quality of physical character descriptions approaching those of a novelist, the librettist has available to him through the musical characterizations provided by the composer a technique enabling him to produce effects unique to opera.

The reminiscent theme as a tool for characterization can become complex. In lieu of physical description, a character may be described by musical themes. For instance, in The Courtship of Miles Standish, Carlson describes Miles Standish most frequently with a steady, unhesitating descending pattern:



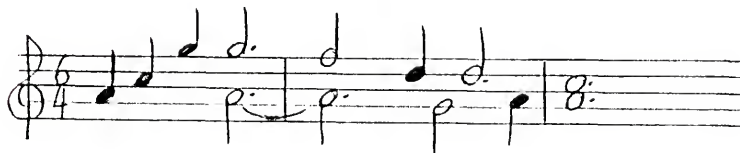
(Carlson, n.p.)

John Alden is characterized consistently by a musical phrase which suggests his desire to woo Priscilla on one hand and his hesitancy to follow through because of his friendship with Miles Standish. The first measure of each phrase rises confidently only to fall back on itself in the second measure.



(Carlson, n.p.)

Priscilla's characteristic theme resembles John Alden's in that it ascends. However it is free in design, ascending with confidence to suggest Priscilla's open, honest personality.



(Carlson, n.p.)

Carlson combines all three of these individual thematic designs into a harmonious whole at the happy conclusion to the opera.



(Carlson, n.p.)

The complexity of musical characterization can go beyond the mere union of various musical themes. Leitmotifs can be developed so as to convey, as Wagner believed, ideas and meanings not directly stated in words or revealed in actions. At his first appearance, Claggart sings a phrase which becomes his hallmark.



(Britten, p. 31)

The theme occurs in the opera at virtually every important reference to Claggart. Because of its frequent appearances in the context of the opera, the mere appearance of the theme can suggest Claggart's evil influence even in his absence. When Dansker cautions Budd to beware of Claggart, the words he uses are taken from Melville and the music he sings is a variation of Claggart's theme. The theme is sung by Vere when



(Britten, p. 168)

he realizes that he will receive the blame for Budd's death. To suggest the continuing influence of Claggart and to parallel his ironic realization, Vere sings an inversion of Claggart's theme



(Britten, p. 293)

Captain Vere is characterized by an ascending musical theme. In Melville's novel, the narrator reveals the name by which Vere is popularly identified, "Starry Vere" (Melville, p. 61). In the opera, a sailor Donald first sings the theme identified with Vere. The theme is then developed into a full ensemble of chorus and soloist (Budd) in which all



(Britten, p. 73)

the men praise Vere and pledge their support of him. Vere's theme is not as recurrent as Claggart's. However, in addition to the emphasis



given to it in the full development of an ensemble, Vere's theme is used again at the penultimate moment. In Melville's novel, Budd's benediction is "delivered in the clear melody of a singing bird on the point of launching from the twig" (Melville, p. 123). In Britten's opera, Budd sings Vere's melody which is echoed by the chorus. The use of Vere's theme at this point enriches Budd's statement. As in



(Britten, p. 321)

Melville's novel, beneath the actual words lie unspoken implications. The reminiscent theme immediately relates Budd's present action with the first appearance of Vere when Budd sang of his allegiance to Vere. This sort of emotional characterization is impossible in a novel. In writing of verse drama, Joseph Kerman explains that "even the most passionate of speeches exists on a level of emotional reserve that music automatically passes" (Kerman, p. 13). Budd's farewell to Vere sung to Vere's theme produces an immediate emotional appeal surpassing that created by Melville.

### III Physical Objects

Articles of clothing, jewelry, and furniture may contribute to characterization in two ways. First, the article may be the deliberate choice of a character, though he may or may not be aware of the effect of

his choice. Second, an article may relate to a character independent of his choosing. In the following discussion, reference will be made only to those librettos which place special emphasis on specific physical objects as means of characterization.

In "The Maypole of Merry Mount" to contrast the "lightsome hearts of Merry Mount" (Hawthorne, p. 70) with the "grim Puritans" (Hawthorne, p. 77), Hawthorne used representative items characteristic of each group. The Maypole worshippers dress in an array of colorful costumes. The Puritans appear "each with a horseload of iron armor to burden his footsteps . . ." (Hawthorne, p. 77). In Stokes's libretto, this contrast is presented in costumes, stage properties, and music. The Cavaliers dress in colorful, outlandish costumes. The Puritans wear "steel caps and breastplates . . ." (Stokes, p. 6). In both story and libretto, the colonists at Merry Mount venerated the colorful, highly decorated Maypole. By contrast, the center of Puritan worship was the church in front of which stood the wooden stocks, "which might be termed the Puritan Maypole" (Hawthorne, p. 77). Two stocks hold a pair of sinners in the opera's first scene. Finally, the colonists loved music and dance. The Puritans frowned on all music but one sort. "Their festivals were fast days, and their chief pastime the singing of psalms" (Hawthorne, p. 77). In the opera, composer Howard Hanson took full advantage of this contrast in musical tastes. To characterize the Cavaliers, he identifies them with a chorus suggestive of an English Dance tune. By contrast, the Puritans counter with a straightforward psalm-like tune. Hawthorne produced his characterizations through lengthy descriptive narration. Hanson and Stokes created their characterizations visually through costumes and stage properties, aurally through music.

James's heroines Catherine Sloper and Milly Theale are characterized by their clothing and jewelry. In Washington Square, Catherine "expressed herself in her clothes. . . ." <sup>9</sup> She often reveals suppressed desires through her choice of clothing. "Her indulgence of it was really the desire of a rather inarticulate nature to manifest itself" (James, p. 169). In the libretto Washington Square, Elmslie describes his heroine's dress once. At her first entrance, Catherine "is so elaborately dressed that she appears older than her twenty-one years" (Elmslie, p. 13). This general description suggests little about Catherine by comparison with James's characterization. In The Wings of the Dove, James characterizes Milly by presenting the effects her dress and jewels have upon other people. To Merton Densher, Milly's "wonderful white dress" (James, II, 213) makes her look "younger, fairer. . ." (James, II, 213). Milly's dress and her pearls, a "long, priceless chain, wound twice around the neck" (James, II, 217), cause Kate to compare Milly to a dove. The old lace and the priceless pearls represent for Kate Milly's chief source of power: wealth. Densher believes that money and power are dove-like "only so far as one remembered that doves have wings and wondrous flights" (James, II, p. 218). For Densher, Milly's "wings and wondrous flights" are her compassion and concern for people. Merton sees Milly's feelings for others, like the wings of a dove, as having recently spread to an inordinate reach to enfold her English friends whom she invited to Venice.

Nothing comparable to this minute characterization is established in the libretto. Ayer suggests Milly's character through a single article of clothing, a shawl. In scene v, when Miles and Milly meet

for the last time, she asks him to give the shawl to Kate. In scene vi, Kate accepts the shawl and automatically places it over a chair. Although Milly has left her fortune to Miles, at the conclusion of this scene both Kate and Miles realize their plan to marry can never be fulfilled. Milly's influence, symbolized by the shawl, continues after her death. As Miles leaves, Aunt Maud enters, grabs the shawl, and puts it on Kate's shoulders. Kate instinctively shrinks from it. The shawl, an article usually intended to cover and protect, horrifies Kate at first. Like the money she left to Miles, the shawl was given to Kate in good conscience. The money was left to enable Kate and Miles to wed. The shawl was meant as a remembrance. Ayer successfully conveys Milly's ironically invisible influence through her shawl, which Kate at first rejects and then is forced to accept.

In Cable's The Grandissimes, Bras-Coupe<sup>é</sup> in the custom of his African homeland appears at his wedding nude and "has painted himself all rings and stripes, antelope fashion" (Cable, p. 178). When the beautiful Madmoiselle, wife of Martinez, "gently bids him go and dress" (Cable, p. 178), he obeys. If his first wedding dress was shocking, Bras-Coupe<sup>é</sup>'s second outfit of "red and blue regimentals" (Cable, p. 178), is ridiculous. This emphasis on Bras-Coupe<sup>é</sup>'s dress contrasts the natural dignity of the slave, who believes he is appropriately dressed for his wedding, with the assumed superiority of the master, who attempts to degrade the bridegroom. This contrast between two outlandish modes of dress is absent from Koanga. In the original version by C. F. Keary (1935), Koanga appears at the wedding ceremony "dressed in bright African robes" (Keary, p. 83). In the revised libretto (Craig and Page, 1974),

all reference to Koanga's dress is dropped. The effects of costumes as a tool of characterization in the libretto are bland when compared to the humor, the pathos, and the social commentary achieved by Cable.

Clothes or items given to or forced upon a character often express facets of his personality. In The Scarlet Letter, Hawthorne places great emphasis upon the cloth letter forced upon Hester by the community as a visible mark of her sin. However, Hester's true character is revealed by the changes she makes in the letter. Hester's elaborate embroidery on the letter suggests her strength of character. In both adaptations of Hawthorne's novel, the librettists emphasize the relation of the letter to Hester's character. In Lathrop's version, the letter prompts the first remark of the chorus after Hester's entrance. As Hester "stands for a moment on the door-step, silent, dignified, yet woebegone" (Lathrop, p. 7), the chorus shouts its disapproval of her attitude as expressed in her embroidery.

See how serpent-like it twines,  
Yon letter, with its coiling lines;  
          . . .  
Lo, she sports with her shame,  
And hath woven the letter  
With gaudy splendor of scarlet. (Lathrop, p. 7)

In Carlson's version, Hester conceals the letter as she enters, revealing it to the crowd only after they have damned her. In neither libretto does the letter receive the emphasis placed on it by Hawthorne. However, this item forced upon the character but made her own does successfully convey Hester's strength and independence of character.

The observable half of a character's nature is treated both dramatically and musically in opera. While a novelist must narrate all

necessary actions which characterize, the librettist specifies in stage directions only certain actions. These usually fall into three types: repeated actions, startling actions, and symbolic actions. Physical details relating to an individual can indicate character traits. The novelist will often devote lengthy passages of description to the physical appearance of a character. The librettist, on the other hand, will refer to physical appearance only in the most general terms. Material objects associated with a character in a novel or in a libretto often contribute to characterization.

In the absence of detailed physical descriptions as a tool for characterization, the librettist and the composer often use music to deepen the characterization outlined in the libretto. Through musical form great subtlety can be given to operatic characters who are almost universally less complex than their literary counterparts. The reminiscent theme, or leitmotif, associated with an individual can remind the audience of the character even in his absence. In a second capacity, the reminiscent theme can suggest a character's thoughts, feelings, and responses which he either will not or cannot reveal. Sensitive musical characterization can add a subtle, direct emotional appeal surpassing that obtainable by words alone.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Edward Morgan Forster, Aspects of the Novel (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1927), p. 46.

<sup>2</sup>Leland Schubert, Hawthorne the Artist (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1944), p. 146.

<sup>3</sup>Wystan Hugh Auden, "Some Reflections on Music and Opera," in The Essence of Opera, p. 356.

<sup>4</sup>The Works of Herman Melville, X. Standard Edition (London: Constable and Company, Ltd., 1923), 271.

<sup>5</sup>Percy MacKaye, Rip Van Winkle (New York: G. Schirmer, 1919), p. iii.

<sup>6</sup>"The essence of the matter was the villainy of the motive in the evoked predatory creatures; so that the result would be ignoble . . . were this element of evil but feebly or inanely suggested. There arose on behalf of my idea the lively interest of a possible suggestion and process of adumbration. The Novels and Tales of Henry James, XII (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1908), XX.

<sup>7</sup>George Martin, "Another Turn," Opera News, (7 March 1970), p. 7.

<sup>8</sup>David Ewen, Encyclopedia of the Opera (New York: Hill and Wang, Inc. 1955), p. 32.

<sup>9</sup>The American Novels and Stories of Henry James, ed. F. O. Matthiessen (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964), p. 169.

CHAPTER FOUR  
CHARACTERIZATION: HIDDEN NATURE

E. M. Forster writes that the second side of man's character, his hidden nature, includes "the pure passions, that is to say the dreams, joys, sorrows and self-communings which politeness or shame prevent him from mentioning" (Aspects, p. 46). Only the novelist can reveal directly the psychological nature of his characters. E. M. Forster writes that "to express this side of human nature is one of the chief functions of the novel" (Aspects, p. 46).

In opera, as in spoken drama, the hidden nature of a character can be conveyed directly to the audience only through some external device. The dramatic use of silence and of stage actions can strongly suggest psychological states, but they cannot specifically identify them. Music in opera may contribute to characterization, but, to do so, it must be heard in relation to a character's situation as expressed in the action. Forster explains that unlike the painter or sculptor who may choose to represent human beings or not, "the musician cannot represent them even if he wishes without the help of a programme" (Aspects, p. 44). The operatic aria or some lyric substitute enables the librettist and the composer to portray directly the psychological nature of a character.

I Aria

According to Hamm, "The recitative-aria structure . . . is the most fundamental concept in opera, being used in some form almost from the first opera to the most recent" (Opera, p. 67). The recitative has



traditionally carried the dramatic weight of the libretto but is often musically static. The aria, a moment of reflection or introspection, focusing on character while the action of the plot stops, may be musically dynamic but is dramatically static. As Joseph Kerman observes, "Arias do not ordinarily include any physical action at all" (Opera as Drama, p. 96). The information presented by a character in an aria will represent the truth as he sees it. The audience can trust the character because, as W. H. Auden explains, "what even is sung is the case" ("Some Reflections," in The Essence Of Opera, p. 357). A limited degree of irony may be achieved at these lyrical moments through musical characterization which is at variance with the character's intentions. The chorus in Billy Budd sings a theme both suggestive of the movement of the sea and associated throughout the opera with the idea of mutiny.<sup>1</sup>



(Britten, p. 8)

To this musical theme, Budd sings his farewell to the Rights-of-Man



while the sailors sing the melody off stage. The innocence of Budd and the restlessness of the crew are musically united to convey the unintentional irony in Budd's statement which so disturbs the officers.

However, "unless employed very sparingly such devices cause confusion rather than insight" (Auden, p. 357). The aria, like the dramatic soliloquy to which it has been compared,<sup>2</sup> "is the clue given to the audience, and must be the truth itself."<sup>3</sup>

A novelist has two methods by which he can reveal the psychological nature of his characters. First, a narrator can directly present these characteristics through narrative description, as in Irving's portraits of the dreams and ambitions of Ichabod Crane. This fictional approach to characterization resembles the aria in two ways: The advance of the plot is temporarily delayed during these passages, and these descriptions often act as summary, presenting in a large block the observations and reactions of a character to the preceding action. Second, a character can reveal his own inner nature directly to the reader, as in James's use of the interior monologue. This fictional technique closely parallels the operatic aria in that both are self-revelations. However, the interior monologue and the aria have important differences. In a modern novel, the observations, attitudes, and responses of a character are presented, like stones in a mosaic, as parts of a whole to be seen and understood only when the work is completed. The total picture of character depends finally upon the interrelation of all its parts. By contrast, the hidden qualities of a character expressed in an operatic aria are discrete and immediately clear. Musically, the aria functions as a climax; dramatically, as synthesis. Lehman Engel explains: ". . . these lyrical climaxes gather together the loose ends of the scenes and focus in on one direct emotional line" (Words With Music, p. 179).

In Act II of Koanga, Palmyra sings an aria which blatantly interrupts the action of the scene in which Simon Perez and Clotilda, Palmyra's half-sister, are plotting to prevent Palmyra's marriage to Koanga. Alone on stage, Palmyra declares her love for Koanga. In the middle of her aria, Palmyra suddenly sings of Africa as her native land. To have her sing of Africa as the land of her fathers is ridiculous since she has just learned from Perez that her father was a white man and a plantation owner. In the 1973 revision by Craig and Page, Palmyra sings of Africa as the "land of his [Koanga's] fathers" (Craig and Page, p. 81). Her thoughts of Koanga as a captured slave and former African prince are now logically linked to her ideas of his former home. The psychological movement in the revised version is more consistent with Palmyra's character. All of this, however, has nothing to do with Palmyra in Cable's novel, who never returns the love Bras-Coupe' expresses for her.

Katrina Van Tassel, the heroine of Irving's "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," is a riddle to the narrator. For this reason, her character is not detailed. Pretty, spoiled, and, as some say, even a coquette, Katrina emerges as a strong-willed, humorous character. After her father's party, Katrina, in a scene never fully explained by the narrator, sends Ichabod Crane from the house "with an air quite desolate and chopfallen."<sup>4</sup> The narrator dismisses this episode as an unfortunate turn in the welfare of Crane. The scene only hints at Katrina's feelings. In Benét's The Headless Horseman, a quite different Katrina compared to Irving's lighthearted flirt reveals her thoughts. In a woebegone frame of mind because of her betrothal to Crane, Katrina ends her "solo" by

vowing to kill herself rather than to marry Ichabod Crane. A typical romantic heroine, Katrina is prepared to die for true love. This sentiment would never have entered the mind of Irving's carefree character.

In Carlson's Hester, three arias are sung: first, in Act II, where Hester prays, portraying her reliance on faith but revealing nothing of her inner torment. Then in Act III, Arthur sings the first of two arias. Alone in his room, Arthur contrasts his outer priestly appearance with his inner sin and guilt. In words taken directly from Hawthorne's novel, the aria express the conflict within Arthur. Finally, in Act IV, he sings as he begins to hallucinate. Arthur's inner guilt and terror are projected outwardly by the "flaming A" and by several visions of Roger Chillingworth. "'Tis that old fiend at my elbow day and night. / See, he's there and there! Everywhere" (Carlson, p. 209)! The scene is reminiscent of the second scaffold scene in the novel in which Arthur shouts his guilt for all to hear. However, the ambiguity and irony in Hawthorne are missing in the operatic scene. In the opera, Arthur is alone until the end of the scene when the real Chillingworth emerges from the shadows. He is the only person to hear Arthur's confession of inner torment. In Hawthorne, Arthur's shouts are heard clearly enough to cause nearby residents to raise their windows. These audible but ineffective confessions by Arthur are ironically self-destructive. They increase his inner turmoil rather than ease it. More significantly, these feeble attempts portray Arthur's strong impulse to confess and his weak will to do so.

Peterkee, the young girl who accompanies Rip Van Winkle to the mountains in Percy MacKaye's libretto, is an original operatic characterization. Little attempt, however, was made by the librettist at any psychological characterization. In Act III, Peterkee goes to Rip's cottage twenty years after her return from the mountains without Rip. Most of her aria is an apostrophe first to Rip's house and then to the magic flask which she had hidden there twenty years before. In her aria, Peterkee admits her emerging love for Rip, whom she had known as a little girl. Such an expression of romantic love is somewhat farfetched, even for an operatic heroine. Peterkee would have been a mere child when she accompanied Rip to the mountains. Yet, twenty years later she waits the return of Rip, who has also aged. She has remained faithful beyond the bounds of expectation.

Both Milly Theale and Kate Croy in Ayer's The Wings of the Dove indirectly reveal aspects of their personalities in arias as opposite in character as those of the two women. In scene ii, shortly after her arrival at Aunt Maud's dinner party, Milly is asked to sing. Hesitant at first, Milly is finally persuaded to perform. The fact that her aria is a conscious performance, not an introspective declamation, suggests her outgoing nature and her willingness to communicate with people. Milly also reveals something of herself, although perhaps unintentionally, in the lyrics she sings. Her song concerns a persona determined to seek out human relationships at their most meaningful level:

When all is fair and still  
 And fields with flowers fill  
 And lovers, as they will  
 Hold hands above,  
 I'd follow them until  
 The darkness hides the hill,  
 Were I a dove.

(Ayer, pp. 54-55)

This persona, having forsaken his past, assumes a serious attitude as he pursues his goal. No obstacle, he believes, can keep him from acquiring these desired relationships.

Were I a dove the snow  
 Of winter would not blow  
 That kept me down below,  
 When up above  
 A pair of lovers go  
 Who know, and lovers know,  
 I am a dove.

(Ayer, pp. 57-58)

The attitudes and goals of the persona expressed in Milly's song parallel her own determination to lead a full life. This picture closely parallels that of James's heroine.

Traveling to Europe to "face the whole assault of life" (James, I, 125), Milly wishes to leave her shallow past behind and to experience life at its deepest, most meaningful level. Through her experiences in Europe, Milly discovers what she seemed instinctively to have understood all along: the source of a meaningful life lies in human relationships. The quality of these relationships depends upon the degree to which a person is willing to involve himself in establishing them. Milly comes to understand this principle clearly when she visits the National Gallery where she observes the difference in creative involvement between the artist and the copyist. For Milly the copyist

represents the individual who refuses to involve himself. To avoid pain and disappointment, the copyist passively creates his art. "The case was the case of escape, of living under water, of being at once impersonal and firm" (James, I, 288). On the other hand, the artist, willing to risk everything was "truly for the larger life, not the smaller life, the life of which the actual pitch, for example, was an interest, the interest of compassion, in misguided efforts" (James, I, 288-289). Milly, like the copyist, believes she is not strong enough for the "larger life." However, like the artist, Milly's compassion for people compels her to become involved, to take chances which lead to painful and tragic consequences.

By contrast, Kate Croy's aria in scene vi is introspective in nature. This quality of her aria suggests Kate's desire for secrecy and solitude as much as Milly's public performance comments on her wish for openness. Kate never intended that her plan to secure Milly's fortune through Miles should be known to anyone. Seated next to the portrait which Milly resembles, Kate reads aloud a letter from Susan Stringham. Having anticipated Milly's death, Kate is stunned, nevertheless, to read that Susan blames Milly's early death on another's betrayal of her. This knowledge prompts Kate's guilty, agitated comments which alternately punctuate her reading of the letter. In her first prolonged outburst, Kate attempts to transfer her sense of guilt to Milly's innocent nature. Had Milly been more worldly, she could not have been fooled.

You knew the world but when it smiled.  
 Or else put out a hand protectingly.  
 Always an orphan.  
 Always an only child.  
 Death came early to all your family and now to you  
 before you were aware. (Ayer, pp. 156-157)

Kate tries to ease her conscience through her ridicule of Milly and by her rationalization that she had warned Milly about her new London friends.

I warned you what we were about.  
 You did not doubt that you were better.  
 You were bee and hive and honey. (Ayer, p. 159)

Kate suddenly admits to herself that her entire scheme was a plan to keep Miles. Realizing that her selfish plan has recoiled upon her, Kate hysterically cries out for Milly to have pity upon her. That she cannot place her guilt elsewhere is the truth that Kate must accept. In her vain attempts to ease her conscience and in her final outcry, Kate utters thoughts that she would never admit to anyone.

The progression in the development of Kate's character from her desire to read the letter and her refusal to accept its meaning to her final confrontation with reality parallels the development of a remarkable paragraph in James's novel. Preparing to describe the effect of Milly's death on him, Merton Densher senses that in spite of Kate's request, she seems hesitant to listen. Densher realizes that to reveal the true circumstances surrounding his last days with Milly would produce emotions in Kate which he fears she could not handle.

She gave him her quietest attention, but he by this time saw that, so far as telling her all was concerned, she would be divided between the wish and the reluctance to hear it; between the curiosity that, not unnaturally, would consume her and the opposing scruple of a respect for misfortune. The more she studied him too -- and he had never so felt her closely attached to his face -- the more the choice of an attitude would become impossible to her. There would be a feeling, uppermost, and the feeling wouldn't be eagerness. This perception grew in him, and he even, with his imagination, had for a moment the quick forecast of her possibly breaking out at him, should he go too far, with a wonderful: "What horrors are you telling me." (James, II, 317-18)



Through his careful construction of the arias of Milly and Kate, Ayer has succeeded in creating two characters richly suggestive of their Jamesian counterparts.

In the Forster-Crozier adaptation of Billy Budd, the librettists created an aria for each of the three principal characters. The least problematic to Forster in terms of characterization was John Claggart. About him, Forster wrote, "Melville's hint of 'natural depravity' has to be followed."<sup>5</sup> Following the soup-spilling incident in the novel and succeeding the Squeak-Budd fight in the libretto, Claggart addresses Budd with the same words: "Handsomely done, my lad. And handsome is as handsome did it, too!" These equivocal words prompt Melville's narrator to describe at length in Chapter 11 and 12 the essential quality of Claggart's nature. His evil characteristic was "born with him . . . in short 'a depravity according to nature'" (Melville, p. 76). Budd's innocent nature is diametrically opposed to that of Claggart. The master-at-arms understands this immediately upon his first meeting with Budd. Claggart knows that he is unable "to annul the elemental evil in him" (Melville, p. 78) and is powerless to be like the innocent Budd. His fate is "to act out to the end of the part allotted it" (Melville, p. 78). Claggart's soliloquy has a famous operatic precedent in Iago's "Credo" in the Boito-Verdi Otello. However, in Forster's view, "Claggart gets no kick out of evil as Iago did. . ." ("Letter," p. 5). Unlike Iago, who methodically plots his scheme and manipulates his victims, Claggart acts on a sense of compulsion.

Like his literary counterpart, the operatic Claggart immediately understands the moral significance of Budd's nature. He would prefer

to avoid the approaching conflict. However, to preserve his own world, Claggart realizes he has no alternative: "Having seen you, what choice remains to me? None! None! I am doomed to annihilate you, I am vowed to your destruction. I will wipe you off the face of the earth" (Forster and Crozier, p. 136-137). This operatic characterization successfully achieves two desired ends. First, Claggart's character is necessarily somewhat simplified. For purposes of intelligible drama, the murky portrait of Claggart which emerges from Melville's novel had to be made clear and direct. Second, while a bit more obvious in his evil than is Melville's creation, the operatic figure presented, nevertheless, is consistently faithful in spirit to Melville's Claggart.

Forster and Crozier found their central problem of characterization in the figures of Captain Vere and Billy Budd. "Each adapter has his own problems. Ours has been how to make Billy, rather than Vere, the hero" ("Letter," p. 4). Forster felt that Melville had originally intended Budd to be the main character. Melville called the story Billy Budd, "and unless there is strong evidence to the contrary one may assume that an author calls his story after the chief character" ("Letter," 4). In the trial scene, Melville permitted his respect for authority and discipline to deflect him from this intention. Vere delivers a lengthy argument calling for the fullest punishment under naval law. His involvement in the crisis of the story leads directly to the climactic moment and places Vere at the center of the action. As one responsible for these two major plot developments, Vere, at least momentarily, becomes the central character. Acting on their conviction that Budd

should be the central figure in their drama. the librettists removed Vere from this pivotal position,

To direct attention toward Budd, the librettists and their composer Benjamin Britten created a lengthy and highly structured musico-dramatic sequence. Beginning immediately after Claggart's death, this long passage extends through Act II, iii, and ends just prior to Budd's execution. An important orchestral interlude divides the passage. In the first section, Vere sings an aria that is, in turn, also divided by the trial of Budd. In the first part of his aria, Vere expresses the dilemma he faces. Vere's personal feelings concerning the accused are at war with his official responses relating to naval law and military justice. Vere views the upcoming trial as his own. Regardless of which decision he reaches, Vere realizes the opposing opinion can present an equally valid argument. Consequently, when the drumhead court requests his advice, Vere refuses to offer it. He calls for the verdict. By not participating in the decision of his court, Vere becomes passive as opposed to Melville's highly active character. In the opera, Vere does not act upon Budd as he does in the novel. In the second half of his aria, Vere questions the morality of his passive stance and wonders about Budd's reaction toward him. Without resolving these questions, Vere enters the stateroom to inform Budd of the court's verdict. This long scene establishes Vere as a passive character and focuses attention on Budd in two ways. First, the nature of Budd's reaction and opinions concerning the verdict presents a major conflict within Vere. Second, Budd's appearance in the next scene is anticipated by this concern to know his responses.

The second scene, focusing on Budd, is momentarily delayed to signify the Vere-Budd interview off stage. To suggest the nature of this meeting, Britten composed an orchestral interlude consisting of a highly original progression of thirty-four chords (see fig. 1). Here, as in Chapter 22 of Melville's novel, the contents of the interview are not revealed. Melville's narrator offers some inconclusive speculation based upon his understanding of the characters of Vere and Budd. This musical interlude suggests to the imagination a far more profound sense of the nature of this final meeting than do the words of Melville's narrator.

Budd's aria is also divided. In the first half, he sings, to a gentle, "slowly moving" melody, words lifted directly from "Billy in the Darbies," the ballad which ends Melville's novel. The words and the music combine to produce a trance-like effect suggestive of a passage in Chapter 24 of the novel where Billy has "the look of a slumbering child in the cradle" (Melville, p. 119). Dansker interrupts to tell Budd that his friends among the crew plan to save him. Budd asks Dansker to stop them. Budd tells Dansker that both he and Vere are "in sore trouble . . . with great need of strength" (Forster and Crozier, p. 308). At this point in the scene, Budd believes he can offer no help to Vere. After Dansker leaves, Budd resumes by singing, to long, soaring musical phrases, a sorrowful farewell to all earthly joys. Suddenly the tone changes to one of hope. Budd describes a vision of a metaphoric ship sailing confidently through the storm of fate toward its destination.

102 Very slow - *Largo*

Brass Tutti W.W. Str. W.W. & Hns. Tutti Str.

*f ff mf p mf*

Fl. Brass

W.W. Brass Hns. W.W. Hns. Str.

*p pp pp p pp p f*

103

W.W. Str. Brass W.W. Hns. W.W. Brass

*mf p pp ppp pp ppp pp*

W.W. Hns. Brass W.W. Str. W.W. Hns.

*ppp pp mf pp ppp pp ppp*

Str.

W.W. Hns. W.W. Brass (con sord.) Hns.

*ppp pp ppp ppp ppp*

CURTAIN

Fig. 1

But I've sighted a sail in the storm,  
 The far shining sail that's not fate,  
 And I'm contented,  
 I've seen where she's bound for.  
 She has a land of her own where she'll anchor forever.  
 Oh, I'm contented. (Forster and Crozier, pp. 311-312).

These words in verse have a two-fold importance. First, they will reappear during the Epilogue as a means of suggesting the answer to Vere's nagging questions. Second, they convey Budd's final belief in a strong persistent force in life other than fate. Forster believed this was Melville's position also.

Melville believed in Fate, but kept seeing out of the corner of his eye a white sail beating up against the storm. Doom was fixed, the trap clicked, the body splashed, the fish nibbled. But he kept seeing the obstinate white sail. ("Letter," p. 5)

Budd's aria ends on a note of confidence and resolution. Billy now possesses the strength which he had described to Dansker as his great need. The source of this strength is suggested in the orchestral accompaniment. Chords, strongly reminiscent of those played during the Vere-Budd interview are now heard. They relate Budd's new found strength to the undisclosed nature of the interview. Something had passed between Vere and Budd which provides Budd with needed strength and understanding at this crucial moment. This unrevealed source of strength also affects Captain Vere. In the opera's Epilogue, Vere, an old man, finally arrives at an understanding of Budd's influence upon him. He sings the identical words Budd sang in the second half of his aria: ". . . but I've sighted a sail in the storm, the far-shining sail . . ." (Melville, p. 333). However, the form of the lyrics has now been altered. For Budd, the lyrics were written in verse. For Vere, the same words appear in

prose. This stylistic difference suggests that the vision of the storm-bound ship originated with Budd. Indeed, Vere sees that Budd exerted the necessary love to save him. "But he has saved me, and blessed me, and the love that passes understanding has come to me" (Forster and Crozier, pp. 332-333). This final, all-important, influence of Budd's spirit upon Vere establishes Budd clearly as the opera's hero. Forster wrote that a hero must remain the source of the meaning of a story: "The hero hangs dead from the yard arm, dead irredeemably and not in heaven, dead as a doornail, dead as Antigone, and he has given us life" ("Letter," p. 6). The preceding arias suggest the variety and the relative structural freedom possible within the framework of the recitative-aria convention. These variations in characterization may range from the simple statements of Katrina and Peterkee, to the implied meanings of Milly Theale, to the structural relationship in the Vere-Budd complex.

## II Exit Aria and Scena

The exit aria and the scena, two conventional operatic forms, are highly structured and have specific dramaturgical functions. Placed at the end of a scene, the exit aria always looks backward and never forward. When this particular moment is ended, the character leaves the stage. The scena, a musical structure longer and, generally, more dramatic than an aria, traditionally has consisted of three sections: a slow aria, a recitative, and a fast aria, called a cabaletta. The recitative between these arias usually provides the character with some excuse to change his mind with vehement determination. The sentiments expressed in

the cabaletta usually look forward and often spawn the action to follow.

Wainwright's Rip Van Winkle and Karsavina's The Jumping Frog of Calaveras County contain examples of the exit aria. In Act II, ii Dame Van Winkle receives a letter from her daughter Alice, who unexpectedly has decided to leave home on a possibly fatal mission. Dame Van Winkle, whose son Rip has recently joined the army, laments the loss of her family in a "Ballad" which functions dramatically as an exit aria. Romantically looking back on the happiness of her youth and expressing her sense of despair and loneliness in old age, Dame Van Winkle sums up her present outlook on life: "We weep for friends and flowers all dead / Sorrow and thorns alone remain" (Wainwright, p. 25). No such picture of Rip's wife as a remorseful woman is seen in Irving's tale. In the context of the opera, the Dame's admission of her past errors and missed opportunities directs sympathy toward her husband and away from herself. In Karsavina's libretto, while Smiley fetches the Stranger a frog from the nearby swamp, the Stranger fills Daniel with buckshot and sits down to reminisce. In an exit aria, the Stranger describes his routine as a gambler and a confidence man.

Just keep on the lookout for the big chance,  
When it comes grab it by the seat of the pants.  
Each time, each time I fool 'em,  
Take what they got,  
But this time, by golly, I hit the jackpot.  
Forty dollars U. S. money and a home cooked meal;  
Lovin' without matrimony and all-around good deal!  
(Karsavina, pp. 62-63).

This summary of his habits and way of life makes the Stranger much more familiar in the opera than he is in the story. In Twain, he remains a stranger as he comes and goes without any explanation. The narrator



reveals nothing relating to his motivations. Rather than being a gambler, Twain's stranger seems more a practical joker. The self-revelation by the Stranger in the opera clearly shows him as a polished cheat without a conscience and makes him an unsavory character.

The extended scena is used in two librettos, Wainwright's Rip Van Winkle and Lathrop's The Scarlet Letter. Act II of Wainwright's libretto involves Alice in a conventional melodramatic love triangle. Alice and Captain Edward are in love. Frederick, Captain Edward's best friend, is rejected by Alice and his friendship turns to hatred. After the men leave for battle, Alice, in an aria, laments the absence of Edward and prays for strength and guidance. The recitative which follows expresses Alice's problem: she does not know how to save Edward from Frederick's treachery. In her cabaletta, Alice resolves her quandary by resolving with firm determination to save Edward or to die in the attempt. Wainwright supplied Bristow with a highly popular but often ill-used operatic convention. In the opinion of Joseph Kerman, the cabaletta was "one of the worst lyric conventions of early nineteenth-century opera" (Kerman, p. 146). The arias for Vere and Budd, related to this convention, reveal each character's initial situation, provide the motivation for a change, and present the character's change in attitude. However, in the Vere-Budd complex, the formula is far more dramatically effective than in Alice's scena. In Act II of The Scarlet Letter, Hester Prynne reminisces about her childhood and lost innocence. Awakened from her reverie by an approaching group of Pilgrims, Hester goes to greet them. When they "draw away from Hester with dread and scorn" (Lathrop, p. 21), her moment of joy is shattered. In a fast, vengeful aria, Hester renounces

repentance and asks God to punish the group. This change in attitude is so stark as to be inconsistent with her character. Hester is never again seen to react so irrationally. Even her suicide is better motivated than this outburst. In this instance, she in no way resembles Hawthorne's heroine, who accepts her punishment without comment. This cabaletta destroys any sympathy created for Hester up to this point. Her emotions are non-productive for she never acts on them. In this sense, the cabaletta does not fulfill its dramaturgic function of spawning future action.

Kenward Elmslie in his libretto of Washington Square created a long scena for Catherine. While the lyrics are not divided into the conventional scena form, the progression of this scene closely parallels that of the aria-recitative-cabaletta pattern. At great length, Catherine expresses her fading hope that Morris Townsend will return. Her romantic fantasies lead slowly to a quiet desperation. Suddenly, Catherine stands and expresses her determination to face reality.

Gone  
 Gone for good . . .  
 To be --  
 To be --  
 Fearless. (Elmslie, pp. 91-92)

Moving closer to the center of her reality, Catherine next evaluates the main forces that have exerted the greatest influence upon her life: her father and Morris Townsend. Suddenly, as though unable or unwilling to face reality, Catherine relapses into her romantic fantasies of wedded bliss. Her claim that she still loves Morris awakens her to the truth of her situation.

I cannot will love  
 Where none exists.  
 I cannot walk through mirrors  
 Into rooms full of wishful imaginings. (Elmslie, p. 92)

Like James's heroine, Catherine finally confronts the truth that she must take charge of her own life.

There is nothing to do,  
 Meanwhile,  
 But begin.  
 Begin to become.  
 Begin to become--myself. (Elmslie, p. 93)

By comparison, Catherine's thoughts and resolution are far more credible than those of Lathrop's Hester Prynne. We have only to imagine the possibility of Catherine's cursing those around her and committing suicide to understand the extent to which this is true. Elmslie, by following James's lead, created a convincing and quite human operatic character.

Catherine's examination of her past and her confrontation with the future combine the summary, reminiscent functions of the exit aria with the active, forward-looking purposes of the cabaletta. By closing a scene or an act with this musico-dramatic structure, the librettist and composer could provide a rousing curtain. Violetta's aria "Ah fors e lui" and her cabaletta "Sempre libera" at the end of Act I of Verdi's La Traviata is a well-known and dramatically successful example. Mary Rutledge in Walter Guiterman's The Man Without a Country sings such an aria at the end of Act I after Nolan's trial. She contrasts Nolan's unusual punishment with Burr's freedom. Believing this sentence too severe, she vows to seek Nolan's release. This promise explains her appearance at Gibraltar and her continued involvement in the story.

Philip Nolan sings an aria at the close of Act II, i, which presents a hero remarkably different from Hale's conception. Emotionally overcome by a stanza in The Lay of the Last Minstrel, Nolan thinks about the United States and his past guilt and foolish pride. Nolan wishes to atone for his mistake. Looking to the future, he decides death is the only acceptable means of expiation. The aria ends with an anticlimactic reference to Mary. He must see her one more time to explain that he will accept no pardon she may be able to obtain. Nolan's entire plan is ludicrously romantic. By the time of the Gibraltar scene, his determination to carry it out borders on mania. The final short scene of the opera presents the fulfillment of Nolan's death wish. In Hale's story, Nolan's involvement in a naval battle brings him recognition from his shipmates and from his captain. However, he receives no pardon for his bravery. In the opera, the fallacious idea of a disgraced military prisoner gaining pardon for his past actions through a sacrificial death produces an incredibly romantic hero and an unfortunately mawkish drama.

At the conclusion of scene i in Myfanwy Piper's Owen Wingrave, Spencer Coyle, the military tutor of Owen, sings an aria which in its development closely parallels a section in James's short story. In the first section of the aria, Coyle looks back with pride and some complacency at his career as an instructor. The paragraph in James begins with a similar explanation: "Mr. Coyle was a professional 'coach'; he prepared young men for the army . . ."(James, p. 14). The second section of his aria expresses Coyle's admiration for Owen. At the same time, he is puzzled by Owen's action and fearful of their consequences. In James,

the narrator in a similar progression reveals that Coyle "had taken a particular fancy to Owen Wingrave" (James, p. 14) and is disturbed by Owen's attitude. In the last section, Coyle expresses his concern about results of Owen's pacifism. The parallel portion of the short story presents Coyle's anxiety about calling on Miss Wingrave to explain Owen's actions. While this aria has the distinctive qualities of the exit aria and the scena, Coyle's character development reverses the traditional progression in these arias. Initially, the character's insecure position is presented. As the aria progresses, the character explores his alternatives. By the end of the aria, he has taken a firm stand. As with Captain Vere, Coyle begins with the known, as he confidently reviews his past. He ends by facing the unknown, as he hesitantly questions the future.

### III Lyric Substitute

The idea of operatic continuity in which the librettist and the composer reduce the dichotomy inherent in the recitative-aria structure by weaving the portions of dramatic action and the sections of static introspection into a continuous whole "was a universal ideal of nineteenth-century music . . ." (Kerman, p. 134). Most closely associated with Wagner and Verdi, the idea of "continuous opera" has received lasting support in the twentieth century.

Ernst Krenek and Benjamin Britten have created operas which produce this continuous effect, Krenek, the librettist-composer of The Bell Tower, advocated and defended the twelve-tone technique of Arnold Schoenberg. The most important and most basic idea formulated for this new music was

the avoidance of tonality. All twelve tones of the chromatic scale may be chosen by a composer in any order. However, no note may be repeated until all the other eleven have appeared. The first measure of Krenek's The Bell Tower illustrates this theory.

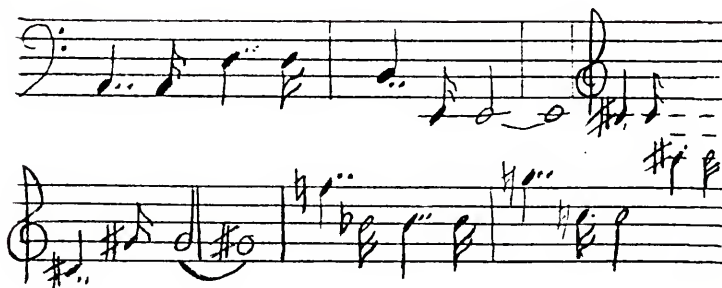


6

This new technique results in musical fragments as opposed to the larger units created in older music. "By their very nature the principles of the new music lead away from the closed forms, and realize instead the idea of 'fragments.'"<sup>7</sup> In applying these ideas to music drama, Krenek thought of "closed forms" as the old recitative-aria formula. "In the old opera, interrupting the music by the spoken word<sup>8</sup> served to emphasize the outline of the closed form" (Krenek, p. 351). Krenek believes the fragmentary nature of the new music produces interruptions which are natural because they are part of the structure of the music: "These interruptions in the new opera have quite a different effect; they are real interruptions, preventing the development of the closed form" (p. 351). The new music, in spite of this fragmentary quality, is "most complete in artistic development" (Krenek, p. 350). Each twelve-tone composition has a basic series of twelve intervals called a tone row upon which all variations in order, octave, tempo, and other musical elements are created.

Britten's The Turn of The Screw offers a superb example of this developmental practice. Between the Prologue and scene i, the orchestra states the tone row theme, clearly labelled as such in the score:

THEME



(Britten, p. 5)

Analogous to the "Screw" of the title, this theme receives fifteen variations, one between each scene of the opera. As George Martin has observed, this tone row "proves to be linked with everything else in the score" (Martin, p. 7). Providing the necessary musical development and continuity, these variations are a musical counterpart to James's dictum that a novel is a living organism of intricately related parts.

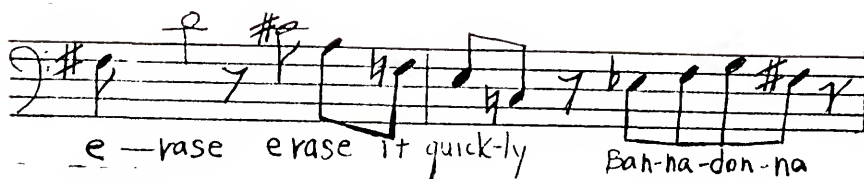
The style of operas such as The Bell Tower and The Turn of the Screw has been called "continuous recitative." An outgrowth of the verismo movement in Italian opera, this technique "was evolved as a means of escaping the recitative-aria conventions. . . ." <sup>9</sup> One of its chief advantages is to allow the drama to unfold rapidly with minimum interruptions. However, these determined efforts to produce a continuous, forward moving dramatic statement have not entirely eliminated the static, lyric introspection. Although radically abbreviated by comparison

with the older closed musical forms, these lyric substitutes may be found in operas of "continuous recitative."

Both Una and Bannadonna in The Bell Tower have moments of lyric introspection. In scene i, after Una's father is killed, the orchestra plays a sustained chord as the workmen file off stage. Una's brief lyrical moment (only thirty-five measures) is introduced by a dissonant strumming effect in the orchestra which calls attention to Una's lament that follows. While lacking the musical breadth of most conventional arias, Una's lyric expression possesses several characteristics of the aria. First, the strong, definite introduction by the orchestra abruptly stops the forward movement of the action. Second, and most important, it allows for the expression of feelings and the revelation of thoughts which Una would otherwise never make known.

Bannadonna's short (fifty-three measures) lyrical revelation resembles the much longer form of the scena. In the first section of twenty-five measures, he brags about his bell, expresses his joy, and ecstatically imagines his name ringing forever through his great artistic creation. Suddenly, he notices a flaw in the bell. In nineteen measures of highly agitated recitative, Bannadonna questions how this could have happened. This section motivates his emotional change from joy to anger which propels him to act. His final expression in thirteen measures begins with a passage of almost total lyric freedom. While the orchestra plays "colla voce," Bannadonna, in an exaggerated lyricism, sings of his determination to erase the flaw.





(Krenek, pp. 25-26)

In this passage, Pannadonna admits ideas that he would never tell anyone. His aria substitute is brought to a definite close by the orchestra on a quiet chord sustained for two measures.

Britten's The Turn of the Screw has been singled out by Robert Evett as one of the most successful operas of "continuous recitative." Most of the opera is presented in recitative while the orchestra provides vigorous support. In scene i, the Governess rides toward Bly in a coach. In a "free recitative" indicated in the score, she doubts her ability to fulfill her new duties. The agitated, disconnected musical fragments she sings perfectly mirror her anxious, insecure state. In the closed form of older operas, this scene would have supplied the perfect static situation for an aria introspection. In The Turn of the Screw, Britten "has pushed recitative and aria toward each other to a point where distinctions between them have all but disappeared" (Martin, p. 7). However, in Act II. i, the score clearly indicates "Colloquy and Soliloquy." After the ghosts have completed their "Colloquy," the lights fade in on the Governess. In her fast but hushed soliloquy, the Governess analyzes her situation. She may possess all the facts, but, with evil around her and the truth hidden from her, she is unable to sort them out. The innocent children have corrupted her, their influence causing her not only to fear and to sense evil but to imagine it as well. As the lights fade, the

Governess whispers, "Which way shall I turn" (Piper, pp. 117-118)? Hushed and intimate, this soliloquy lacks the flamboyance of the conventional aria. Opportunities for vocal display and histrionics are absent. On the other hand, the deeply personal character of this anxious moment is perfectly projected by the form of a soliloquy. The disturbing inner thoughts of the Governess, who remains immobile on stage, are most effectively conveyed in her frightened whisperings.

#### IV "Ensemble of Perplexity"

Edward J. Dent identifies two ensemble forms:<sup>10</sup> the "ensemble of perplexity," a major technique for musical characterization, and the "concerted finale," a musico-dramatic device for the advancement of plot. In the first form, several characters faced with a difficult situation express their individual emotions simultaneously, e.g. the sextet from Lucia di Lammermoor. One of the glories of opera, this convention of simultaneity is unique in opera. In drama, such a presentation of character would result in chaos. Fiction can present only the illusion of simultaneous experience because, as A. A. Mendilow writes, language is "a medium of consecutive units constituting a forward-moving linear form of expression. . . ." <sup>11</sup>

Five operas reveal hidden character traits through the "ensemble of perplexity." Wainwright's Rip Van Winkle, Lathrop's The Scarlet Letter, and Elmslie's Washington Square present traditional ensembles during which both stage action stops and stage time is suspended. The simplest of these ensembles involves Rip, his wife, and the chorus of townspeople, all of whom comment in very similar terms upon the trials

of matrimony and the advantages of being single. The largest ensemble with five characters and a chorus appears in The Scarlet Letter. After Hester refuses to respond to Arthur's request for the identity of her lover, the ensemble begins: Arthur praises the kindness of Hester and laments his own weakness. Hester emphasizes her determination to suffer in silence and prays for Dimmesdale's salvation. Chillingworth vows to seek revenge. Bellingham expresses hope for Hester's repentance, and Wilson desires mercy for her while the chorus longs for her punishment. In scene ii of Washington Square, Catherine, Lavinia, and Dr. Sloper, returning home from a party, "seem to have dozed off" (Elmslie, p. 23) in an open carriage. Simultaneously, the threesome reveal their thoughts. Dr. Sloper comments on the "irony of fate" (Elmslie, p. 23) at being trapped in the company of two tiresome women. Catherine recalls the appearance and the touch of Morris Townsend, and Lavinia romanticizes about Catherine's next meeting with Morris. All three ensembles develop from a dramatic situation which produces conflicting emotions in the characters. As with the aria, the "ensemble of perplexity" is a static moment of introspection.

A second "ensemble of perplexity" in Washington Square and one in Piper's Owen Wingrave add an interesting dimension to the form. In addition to simultaneous characterization, these two ensembles present concurrently multiple stage settings and also fuse separate moments in time. In Washington Square, Act II, i. three settings are presented at once. On stage left "a small balcony protrudes from the second floor of a hotel in Venice" (Elmslie, p. 65) in which Catherine is seated writing a letter to Morris. On stage right "the lights reveal a second balcony,

where Dr. Sloper sits at a table, also writing" (Elmslie, p. 65). Beneath these balconies is a third set, Dr. Sloper's study in the house in Washington Square, where Morris and Aunt Lavinia read Catherine's letter. The unique action here is that the letter being written in Venice by Catherine is read simultaneously in Washington Square. When Catherine expresses her love for Morris, concluding with "Sweet husband-to-be, / Sweet husband of mine . . ." (Elmslie, p. 66), Lavinia repeats her words. This unique presentation of character, setting, and time continues until the lights fade on the balconies. A reverse action occurs at the conclusion of the scene. While Morris writes a letter dictated by Lavinia, Catherine reads the letter in her Venice hotel.

The basis for this operatic scene occurs in Chapter XXIII of James's novel. Similar settings and actions are presented with only a suggestion of the simultaneous effect achieved in the libretto. James juxtaposes the separate settings in consecutive sentences. Dr. Sloper "made the grand tour of Europe . . . and . . . remained abroad, not for six months, but for twelve" (James, p. 247). The next sentence places Lavinia Penniman in Washington Square catering to Morris Townsend. In the novel there is no simultaneous presentation of the writing of letter by Catherine and the reading of it by Morris. The reader learns through the narrator that Catherine "heard from her lover with considerable regularity . . ." (James, p. 248). This information of setting and the presentation of the actions and emotions of the characters require several pages in the novel to relate. The scene in the opera presents these various aspects of the libretto more concisely.

In Act I, v of Owen Wingrave, "a week passes during which Owen is under constant attack from his relatives and friends. . ." (Piper, p. 17). In this "abstract scene," Sir Philip, Kate Julian, Mrs. Julian, and Jane Wingrave declare in an ensemble their feelings about Owen's actions. This condensation and fusing of place and time is suggested by a passage in the short story. Spencer Coyle had visited Jane Wingrave to discuss Owen. Less than a week after this visit, Coyle is invited to Paramore. Upon his arrival, Coyle learns from Owen of his experiences during the preceding week. Owen confides "that he had some terrible hours with the grandfather. . . . He had had no idea they would make such a row. His aunt. . . was insulting. . . ; they accused him of putting a public dishonor on their name. . . . Everyone. . . would know he was a young hypocrite. . ." (James, p. 32). This narrative summary of a week's accusations from Owen's family is dramatized in the abstract setting of scene v.

As we have seen, the operatic aria or its lyric substitute combines functions of three literary devices. Like the dramatic soliloquy and fictional narrative description, the aria halts physical action while a character's inner thoughts are revealed. Like the dramatic soliloquy and the novelistic interior monologue, an aria permits a character to reveal directly his own thoughts and ideas. The "ensemble of perplexity" enables the librettist and the composer to present multiple characterizations simultaneously, a device unique to opera. In fiction, simultaneous experiences can only be suggested through narrative description.

Notes

<sup>1</sup>Kobbé's Complete Opera Book, ed. The Earl of Harewood (New York: G. P. Putnam's, 1969), p. 1161.

<sup>2</sup>Lehman Engel, Words and Music (New York: Macmillan Company, 1972), p. 179.

<sup>3</sup>Elmer Edgar Stoll, Shakespeare Studies (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1927), p. 388.

<sup>4</sup>The Works of Washington Irving, IX, The Sketch Book (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1882), 446.

<sup>5</sup>Edward Morgan Forster, "Letter from E. M. Forster," The Griffin (New York: The Readers' Subscription, Inc., 1951), p. 4. Hereafter cited as "Letter."

<sup>6</sup>Ernst Kreneck, The Bell Tower, a manuscript, p. 1

<sup>7</sup>Ernst Kreneck, "The New Music and Today's Theater," in The Essence of Opera (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1969), p. 350.

<sup>8</sup>Krenek refers to German opera, which has traditionally used spoken dialogue as opposed to the Italianate recitative.

<sup>9</sup>Robert Evett, "Mr. Britten Turns the Screw," The New Republic (21 March 1958), 138:22.

<sup>10</sup>Edward J. Dent, Opera (Baltimore: Penquin Books, 1940), p. 38.

<sup>11</sup>A. A. Mendilow, Time and the Novel (New York: Humanities Press, 1965), p. 32.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### PLOT

"Plot" has numerous meanings: story, overt action, skeletal outline, formula, or essence, to suggest a few. R. S. Crane, in an influential essay, gathers these many meanings and defines plot as a two-part synthesis of structure and content. The plot of any novel or drama inclusively is "the particular temporal synthesis effected by the writer of the elements of action, character, and thought that constitutes the matter of his invention."<sup>1</sup> Time, as a structural device, has exerted significant control over dramatic structure. Jackson Barry suggests that writers from Saint Augustine to Pirandello have been fascinated by "the concept of 'now' which is ever present -- moving continually step by step into the unknown future -- and a sense of patterned time -- time viewed retrospectively and essentially statically."<sup>2</sup> This dual nature of time has traditionally affected the structure of opera. In operatic dramaturgy, the librettist is confronted with the dual challenge of presenting an action of coherent dramatic interest and of providing the opportunity for musical development. The basic operatic techniques of recitative, which carries the dramatic weight, and aria, which allows lyric expression, meet the challenge. The wave-like rhythm between the on-going dramatic time which advances the story and the static, reflective moments which, as we saw in Chapter Four, reveal character creates the temporal structure basic to all operatic plots.<sup>3</sup>

Operatic plots appear diverse upon first examination, but from this apparent diversity two characteristics emerge. First, characters

and situations are relatively simple and easily understood.<sup>4</sup> Second, the content of opera librettos is highly emotional. Both composers and librettists have repeatedly referred to this essential characteristic of the operatic plot. Wieland emphasized the necessity for presenting characters "in view of their feelings and emotions" (The Essence of Opera, p. 121). Gluck greatly admired "the language of the heart" and the "strong passions" created by his librettist Raniero Calsabigi for Alceste (The Essence of Opera, p. 107). In his Dictionary of Music, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who "exercised great influence on French music,"<sup>5</sup> describes the presentation of emotional content as the aim of opera: "The force of all the emotions and the violence of all the passions are, then, the principal object of the lyrical drama."<sup>6</sup> Many emotions have been treated operatically: fear, madness, misery, joy, jealousy, hatred, and, not least, love. In the discussion which follows, I shall use "plot" to mean 1.) the alternating temporal structure which controls the forward movement of the story, and 2.) the simplified, highly emotional content which provides the necessary motivation.

In general, when adapting the story in a fictional source, the adaptive librettist will most often keep as close as possible to the original events and characters. Of the sixteen librettos studied, seven present the stories of the original materials with strict fidelity. These range from the nearly line-for-line adaptation by Frederick Carlson of Longfellow's The Courtship of Miles Standish to the radically reduced but still recognizable story line of James's The Wings of the Dove in Ethan Ayer's libretto. The basic story line of the original source is retained to varying degrees in seven other librettos studied. In these, however, major alterations have been made, the most frequent of which



is the deletion or addition of a character. In the two librettos based on Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter, Pearl is eliminated because children's voices are not suitable for operatic singing. Characters added most frequently provide a love interest which did not appear in the original e.g. Una in Krenek's The Bell Tower and Mary Rutledge in Guiterman's A Man Without a Country. However, the basic original story line can be seen in these altered versions. Occasionally, a librettist will base his libretto on an idea in the original and will create his own story line. In Percy MacKaye's Rip Van Winkle, Rip falls asleep for twenty years, but the remainder of the story has nothing to do with the story by Washington Irving. In his libretto Merry Mount, Richard Stokes dramatized one scene from Hawthorne's "The Maypole of Merry Mount." The minor story line of Merry Mount involves the conflict between the Cavaliers and the Puritans, suggested by Hawthorne's story. However, the central interest in Stokes's libretto concerning the inner struggle of Bradford is entirely original. While the story lines of these librettos may vary, the basic structure and content of their plots is the same.

### I Structure

Recitative. "one of the fundamental, constant elements of operatic dramaturgy" (Kernan, p. 29), has traditionally expressed the dramatic part of the plot. There are two basic forms of recitative, the first of which is Secco or "dry" recitative, accompanied by a single instrument such as a harpsichord. This accompaniment modulates through a succession

of related keys and has little melodic interest. The musical shape and rhythm of the secco recitative are ideally derived from the words of the text and produce a declamatory style developed by the very earliest opera composers and used to the present day. In Act I, iii of The Turn of the Screw, the Governess has just read a letter dismissing Miles from his school. Mrs. Grose asks the Governess what she plans to do. Britten sets the exchange of questions and answers which follow to secco recitative.

GOVERNESS

I shall do no-thing.

Mrs G. And what shall you say to him?

Gov. I shall say no-thing

Mrs G. Bra-vo! And I'll stand

Mrs G. Mrs. Grose kisses her. The scene fades.  
by you. O Miss, may I take the liber-ly?

(Britten, p. 31)

The second type of recitative is accompanied by the orchestra. In this expressive or accompanied recitative, the orchestra breaks away from routine chord progression and introduces new harmonies and dissonances expressive of the words and the dramatic situations. The librettos studied in this dissertation offer numerous examples of accompanied recitative to advance the plot. The moment in Act II of Koanga when Simon Perez reveals the secret of Palmyra's birth to her provides an illustration.

**Moderato**

PALMYRA

SIMON PEREZ

Listen, Pal - my - ra! I know the se - cret of your birth.

*mf* *ww* *Ob* *VI trem* *accel* *poco* *a*

(Craig and Page, p. 76)

An extension of accompanied recitative is the parlante, "talking." New to operatic dramaturgy in the nineteenth century, parlante offered a solution to the problem of maintaining dramatic interest while providing musical continuity. Joseph Kerman explains the term:

The principle was to hold together a considerable passage of advancing dialogue by means of a systematic motivic ground-plan in the orchestra; the voices chime in with low-grade counterpoint as best suits the verbal phrase and sentiment. (Kerman, p. 136)

In Act III, vi of The Turn of the Screw, Miles and Flora conspire to lull the Governess and Mrs. Grose asleep so that Flora can meet Miss Jessel. Miles plays the piano while Flora sings a hypnotic tune. As

the scene reaches its climax, the Governess nods. Flora then turns to Mrs. Grose and converses with her. At this point, the declamatory style becomes parlante. The piano provides the musical continuity which gives this section of dialogue a lyric quality (See Fig. 2).

In several operatic forms, spoken dialogue is substituted for recitative. "The most extensive use of spoken dialogue in opera can be found in comic operas of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: Singspiel in German, Opéra-Comique in France, and Ballad opera in England" (Hamm, p. 15). Of the operas studied, two make use of spoken dialogue to advance the plot: Rip Van Winkle by Wainwright and The Headless Horseman by Benét. In this approach to presentation of the plot, the orchestra stops while the actor delivers his line. On cue, the orchestra begins after the important dialogue has been spoken. As in the case of recitative, the decision to have certain lines spoken and not sung is made for dramatic reasons. A composer may choose to have lines spoken if he "feels that the understanding of certain words, phrases, and sentences of his text is absolutely essential to the development of his drama" (Hamm, p. 24).

Sprechstimme, a kind of song-speech, is a modern variation on the recitative and spoken dialogue. In Sprechstimme, "the words are half sung, half spoken with their pitch not exactly notated" (Fwen, p. 483). Again Britten's "recitative opera," The Turn of the Screw, provides an example. In Variation XII, Quint wonders about the contents of the letter written by the Governess in scene iv to her employer. The score indicates he is to sing "In time." However, the exact pitch is indicated

93 During this conversation Miles begins showing off on the piano.

S.G. e - ver! Well, ...

(conversationally)

Mrs. Grose, ..... are you tired?

93

*p*

Via.

Mrs. G. my head do keep nod - ding, nod - ding, nod - ding. It's this warm room.

*pp*

FLORA

*f*

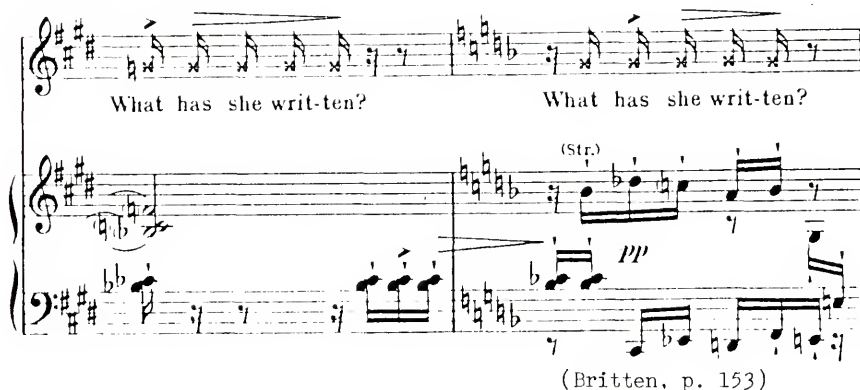
Shut your eyes, then, ... and you shall have a ... cra - dy, a ...

*dim.*

(Britten, pp. 165-66)

Fig. 2

only by the notation ~~A~~. Each time Quint asks his question, he places the emphasis on a different syllable. The soft, rhythmic accompaniment is played with a brush on a snare drum. This technique produces a strong emphasis upon the words, achieved through a strict rhythmic control of their utterance.



The recitative in its various forms has its counterpart in fiction. The dynamic and dramatic portions of a novel or short story are advanced through narration and dialogue. A. A. Mendilow explains that what is expressed in a novel is "either static and the object of description, or dynamic and the object of narrative (Mendilow, p. 23). In Melville's Billy Budd, the young sailor is summoned to Vere's cabin. He does not know the reason for the order. As Budd stands before Vere, the narrator reveals the thoughts of the young sailor. "The only thing that took shape in the young sailor's mind was this: Yes, the captain, I have always thought, looks kindly upon me. Wonder if he's going to make me his coxswain. I should like that. And may be now he is going to ask the master-at-arms about me" (Melville. p. 98). The anticipation of Budd

revealed through this narrative section is adapted by the librettist as accompanied recitative

Billy

Cap-tain of the miz-zen!... Oh, the hon-our!... and you tel-ling me!

*mf*

(Britten, 245)

Dialogue in fiction is an important element in the dramatic method and "Is perhaps the most obvious means of producing the illusion of immediacy and presentness in the reader" (Mendilow, p. 112). Often the dialogue from a portion of a novel or a drama will be adapted with little change. A well-known example of this technique is the interview between the elder Germont and Violetta Valery in Act II of Verdi's La Traviata, adapted from Dumas' drama La dame aux camélias. Kenward Elmslie used this adaptive technique in the final scene of Washington Square, when Catherine Sloper and Morris Townsend meet for the last time. The dialogue in recitative carries the plot forward and is borrowed, in several instances, directly from James's novel.

Novel  
"Why have you never married?"  
he asked, abruptly. "You have had  
opportunities."

"I didn't wish to marry."  
"Yes, you are rich, you are  
free; you had nothing to gain."  
"I had nothing to gain," said  
Catherine.

Libretto  
Morris  
Why have you never married?

Catherine  
I didn't wish to marry.

Morris looked vaguely around him, and gave a deep sigh, "Well, I was in hopes that we might still be friends."

"I meant to tell you, by my aunt, in answer to your message -- if you had waited for an answer -- That is was unnecessary for you to come in that hope."

"Good-bye, then," said Morris, "Excuse my indiscretion."

(James, pp. 294-95)

Morris  
Ah, you are rich.  
You are free.  
You have the one freedom  
Only the rich possess --  
The freedom to do as you please.  
You have nothing to gain,  
Did you Miss Sloper?  
Nothing whatsoever to gain.

Catherine  
Nothing, Nothing to gain.  
Good evening, Mr. Townsend.

(Elmslie, pp. 100-01)

From the beginnings of opera, practitioners have been concerned with its structure. In their efforts to reduce the dichotomy inherent in the recitative-aria structure and to unify plot development and musical continuity, composers and librettists have tried various innovations: one of the most important was the use of the ensemble to advance the plot. The "ensemble of perplexity," discussed in Chapter Four, temporarily impedes the progression of the story to permit emotional expression. The "concerted finale," "one of the most significant musical forms to emerge from the comic opera of the eighteenth century,"<sup>7</sup> is unexcelled as a musico-dramatic technique. Several characters appear on stage and engage in conversation which takes the form of a regular piece of music. "With recitative excluded and everything sung, the plot and the music progress simultaneously to a logical conclusion" (Brody, p. 125).

Of the four comic operas studied, three make use of the concerted finale to advance the plot. In The Headless Horseman, Douglas Moore makes limited use of this technique. Simplified in nature, the concluding ensemble presents the three central characters and the chorus all commenting on the future plans of Katrina Van Tassel and Brom Bones.



With the blessings of old Baldus Van Tassel, Katrina and Brom plan to marry and to open a progressive school. The comments of the principle characters are echoed by the chorus. In Bristow's Rip Van Winkle, I, i, a clearly marked "concerted piece" appears. Dame Van Winkle has located Rip in front of the tavern. The finale is a dramatization of the unhappy marital relation between Rip and his wife, a scene that can be imagined as occurring frequently in a more domestic setting. The chorus comments humorously upon the bliss of the single life, while the action progresses with the musical development to the end of the scene.

In composing The Jumping Frog of Calaveras County, Lucas Foss hoped his short comic opera would have the "air of a Mozartean opera buffa."<sup>8</sup> Mozart had cast much of the dramatic action of his operas in recitative. However, at the great climaxes, Mozart elevated the action by presenting it "on the imaginative level of music, so as to share the emotional dignity of the aria introspection" (Kerman, pp. 84-85). The "concerted ensemble," especially as exemplified in the Mozartean finale, provided a musico-dramatic form essential to the mode of comedy. Speed and timing of action are essential qualities in comedy. The "concerted ensemble" provided the comic opera with a tool for achieving these qualities. Quick changes in mood and in dramatic situations, not possible in the conventional recitative-aria structure, could be handled with ease, both dramatically and musically. The casual, spontaneous atmosphere required of comedy could be captured in the relative freedom of the ensemble. Foss's adaptation of Twain's tale is related largely through a series of ensembles, e.g. duets, trios, quartets, and quintets. In scene ii, from the moment when Smiley returns with the new frog for the

Stranger to the defeat of Daniel in the jumping contest, the action and the music develop simultaneously. In a mixture of Sprechstimme and singing, the characters place their bets. When the contest ends, everyone concedes the defeat of Daniel and the Stranger collects his winnings. At this point the Finale, clearly marked in the score, begins. This finale is Mozartean in effect, if not in structure. Lorenzo Da Ponte, known chiefly as the librettist of Mozart's finest Italian operas, The Marriage of Figaro, Don Giovanni, and Così fan tutte, outlined in his Memoirs the principles on which such finales are built.

This finale, which must remain intimately connected with the opera as a whole, is nevertheless a sort of little comedy or operette all by itself. . . . Recitative is banned from the finale: everybody sings; the finale almost always closes in an uproar. . . . The finale must . . . produce on the stage every singer of the cast . . . ; and if the plot of the drama does not permit, the poet must find a way to make it permit.<sup>9</sup>

In Karsavina's libretto the finale has a three-part structure. Dividing these parts are two short sections which depart from Da Ponte's principles by using recitative, Sprechstimme, and a few lines of spoken dialogue to advance the action. In the first large division, every character in the opera and the chorus comment on Daniel's defeat while the Stranger enjoys the results of this trick. After the Stranger leaves, Smiley and Lulu discover his trick. This plot development is expressed in Sprechstimme. The second section of the finale begins when the Stranger is caught and returned by the angry miners. This departure from Twain's story provides both a happy ending for all the characters except the Stranger, and, as Da Ponte wrote, an excuse for "noise, noise, noise" (Memoirs, p. 59). The miners ridicule the

Stranger, and the second section concludes dramatically and musically when the Guitar Player demands the return of the money (See Fig. 3). Whimperings by the Stranger in Sprechstimme precede the last section in which the crowd makes its final threat, completely terrorizes the Stranger, and kicks him out of town. With the finale having concluded both the musical structure and the dramatic development simultaneously, the opera closes as it had opened, with all the characters singing the praises of Daniel, the frog.

The ensemble can develop simultaneously multiple aspects of the plot. The drumhead court scene in Chapter 21 of Billy Budd, for example, presents the complex of thoughts and emotions which affect the four officers. In the novel, Vere speaks at length about the practical duty of the court members in dealing with Budd. He admonishes his officers, warning against personal feelings and private conscience as guidelines in military decisions. Vere makes it clear to his officers that their duty is to the word of the law and to nothing else. "Our vowed responsibility is in this: That however pitilessly that law may operate in any instances, we nevertheless adhere to it and administer it" (Melville, p. 111). Clemency on the part of this court could be deadly to naval discipline in light of the recent mutinies. In spite of his feelings for Budd, Captain Vere believes that only one decision is possible for the court: "You see, then, whither, prompted by duty and law, I steadfastly drive" (Melville, p. 113).

In Britten's opera, Captain Vere presents only his eyewitness account of the death of Claggart. When the three officers ask for his guidance, he refuses to help them in their decision. The complexity of

72

Lu. *brag-gin' now; what you got to say for your-self?*

Sm. *brag-gin' now; what you got to say for your-self?*

1st Cr. *brag-gin' now; what you got to say for your-self?*

U.H. *brag-gin' now; don't hear you brag-gin' now!*

G.Pl. *brag-gin' now; don't hear you brag-gin' now! Fork o-ver!*

2nd Cr. *brag-gin' now; don't hear you brag-gin' now!*

S. *brag-gin' now; what you got to say for your-self?*

A. *brag-gin' now; what you got to say for your-self?*

T. *brag-gin' now; what you got to say for your-self?*

B. *brag-gin' now; don't hear you brag-gin' now!*

*They shake the Stranger: money rolls out of his pocket.*

*p*

(Karsavina, p. 136)

Fig. 3

the scene in Melville is greatly simplified in the libretto. Divided into three sections each of which advances the plot, the ensemble begins when the 1st Lieutenant, the Sailing Master, and Lieutenant Radcliff enter Vere's cabin. Vere immediately informs the three officers of Claggart's death. The conflict between rationality and emotion presented in Melville's novel is reduced in the opera to the statements expressed by the three officers, each of whom defends the approach he believes the wisest. The 1st Lieutenant speaks for reason: "We must keep our heads" (Britten, p. 265). The Sailing Master seeks strict, immediate retribution: "We must revenge him" (Britten, p. 265). Lieutenant Radcliff pleads for mercy: "Let us be merciful; Let us show pity" (Britten, pp. 266-67). The complexity of the court's situation is fully developed, however, in the structure of the music. The lines of both the 1st Lieutenant and the Sailing Master are *parlante* in  $\frac{3}{4}$  time. The rationality of the 1st Lieutenant and the passionate outbursts of the Sailing Master are expressed in their music. The 1st Lieutenant sings *marcato*

The musical score consists of five staves of music in bass clef, with a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The time signature is 3/4. The first staff begins with a tempo marking of *marcato* and contains the lyrics "We must keep our heads." The second staff contains the lyrics "Oh what unheard-of bru-tal-i-ty!" and is marked *energico*. The third staff contains the lyrics "boy ..... has..... been.... pro - voked. ...." and is marked with a tempo of (9). The fourth and fifth staves continue the musical line without lyrics, with the fifth staff marked with a tempo of (8).

(Britten, p. 265)

eighth-notes and quarter-notes, suggesting a logical, self-confident attitude. The Sailing Master, who is the most excitable of the three men, sings "with energy" a somewhat erratic parlante of sixteenth-notes and eighth-notes. In addition, the more excitable the Sailing Master becomes, the higher he sings. In contrast to these two very strong positions, Lieutenant Radcliff sings in  $\frac{9}{8}$ , a more flowing, relaxed marking. Marked expressive and doubled by the orchestra, this most melodic of the three lines conveys the sympathetic attitude of Radcliff. This musical structure helps to convey the sense of conflict among the court members so essential to the drama.

The second section of the scene, the testimony of Vere and the cross examination of Budd, is presented entirely in recitative and parlante. When Budd is excused after his testimony, the third section begins. Again the text presents the situation in straight forward terms. As the final trio begins, there is no longer any disagreement among the officers. Musically, this agreement is suggested at first when all three men sing in the marking  $\frac{2}{4}$ . Their conversation, in parlante further suggests this agreement through musical imitation. Grove's Dictionary defines "imitation" as every form of thematic development "whereby a voice or part repeats a figure of melody previously heard in another voice or part" (Grove's p. 442). There are two forms of imitation: strict, which presents an exact repetition of the first statement, and free, which preserves "the rhythm and the general outline (rise and fall) of the melodic figure, while altering the intervals" (Grove's, p. 442) The 1st Lieutenant begins a phrase which is freely imitated two measures later by Lieutenant Radcliff (See Fig. 4). The notes each man sings are

89 Rather quick  $\text{♩} = 74$   
*Allegretto*  $\text{♩} = 74$  FIRST LIEUTENANT *pp*

*espr.* *f* *pp* *espr.*

Fitts. Vlns. & sord.

Poor fel - low, .... who

Cit. Solo Vla.

1st Lt. could save him? who could save him,  
 LIEUT. RATCLIFFE *pp*  
 Ay, ... there's naught to dis - cuss, there's naught to dis -

1st Lt. who could save him, poor fel - low?  
 SAILING MASTER *p*  
 Ay, ..... he must swing, .... must swing, must swing, must

Lt. R. cuss, there's naught to dis -

(Britten, p. 280)

Fig. 4

the same; only the rhythm is altered. The Sailing Master begins with imitation but immediately sings unison with the 1st Lieutenant. Finally, the court reaches a unanimous decision, expressed firmly in nine measures of unison singing. The three notes of this passage C, B, and E appear in various sequences. The passage, beginning and ending on C, musically suggests that regardless of the number of influences working on them, the men really have no alternatives.

1st Lt. *pp* - *sempre pp*  
But we've no choice, we've no choice,

S.M. *pp* - *sempre pp*  
But we've no choice, we've no choice,

Lt. R. *pp* - *sempre pp*  
But we've no choice, we've no choice,

1st Lt.  
we've no choice, no choice.

S.M.  
we've no choice, no choice.

Lt. R.  
we've no choice, no choice.

(Britten, p. 285)

The simplicity of the textual adaptation is greatly enhanced by the complexity of the musical structure. The dramatic conflict, outlined in the allegorical statements of the men, is delineated in the three sharply contrasting musical lines. The resolution of this conflict is clarified in the music in the last section of the ensemble. As the three men move closer to their final decision, the musical imitation becomes stricter. Finally, when all alternatives have been examined, the court reaches its final decision.



In addition to the "ensemble of perplexity" and the "concerted ensemble," the chorus has been an ensemble form important to operatic dramaturgy from the earliest operas. In their efforts to recreate Greek drama, the members of the sixteenth-century Camerata made extensive use of the chorus. In Peri's Euridice (1600), the earliest opera to survive, the chorus is on stage during most of the performance. The primary purpose of these early choruses was to create atmosphere and to enhance the emotional effect for the various scenes. This coloristic function has remained the most frequent use of the chorus. At emotional climaxes, the chorus will often contribute to the effect simply by doubling the vocal line of the soloists in a large ensemble. Numerous times in Britten's Billy Budd, the male chorus sings sea chanties which help to provide the maritime atmosphere necessary to the story. Scene ii of The Jumping Frog of Calaveras County is given a strong flavor of the frontier west when the chorus sings the folk tune "Sweet Betsy from Pike." Koanga has several choral melodies with the quality of Negro work songs. The opening chorus of The Man Without a Country, sung by a group of Negro boatman off stage, suggests the story's theme while producing local color.

Lawdy, but we're lonely  
 Pinin' for Ca'lina!  
 Lawd, send us back to de land whar we wuz bawn!  
 Plowin' in de caunfield,  
 Rowin' on de ribber,  
     Lawd, send us back to de land  
     Whar we wuz bawn.<sup>10</sup>

Early in the development of opera, in addition to creating atmosphere and beautiful sound, the chorus contributed to the advancement of

the story. The great eighteenth-century operatic reformer Christoph Gluck is credited with the creation of this choral function. He led the way by casting his chorus as a capricious crowd in Innocenza Guistificata (1755). In Orfeo ed Euridice, the roles of the chorus range from the uncontrollable grief of the shepherds and nymphs over the death of Euridice, to the threats of the Furies' challenge of Orfeo, to the serenity of the Blessed Spirits in the Elysian Fields. In Lathrop's The Scarlet Letter, the chorus appears throughout as a force antagonistic toward Hester. Before Hester appears in Act I, the crowd demands Hester's death:

No mercy would lighten her burden;  
 For judgment stern we would render.  
 . . .  
 Death's doom we would award her,  
 since the law gives us warrant.  
 To judgment! Condemn her! (Carlson, p. 6)

In Hawthorne's novel, a partial change takes place in the attitude of many members of the Puritan community toward Hester. She is viewed by these people as a woman of strength and ability. Hester's admirable strength of character is directly responsible for this change. In Lathrop's libretto, the chorus shows an unwavering animosity toward Hester up to the moment of her death:

[She drinks poison and dies.]  
 Chorus: Thou, Hester, over us triumph has won:  
 Towards mercy turning our sullen hate. (Carlson, p. 40)

This radical departure from the novel changes the entire focus of the conclusion. Hawthorne's heroine wins earthly mercy and forgiveness as a result of her strength and endurance. In the opera, Hester's love for Dimmesdale leads to her suicide. This weak, unchristian act causes the sentimental, melodramatic change in the attitude of the chorus.

In the nineteenth century, the chorus emerged as a full-fledged dramatic force in opera. Modest Mussorgsky's Boris Godunov tells the story of the inner torment and madness of a Czar. As important, however, is the drama of the Russian people in their hopeless struggle against political tyranny, told through the chorus. The chorus as a central dramatic figure which contributes to the plot development is clearly seen in Hanson's Merry Mount and in Britten's Billy Budd. The two large choruses in Merry Mount representing the opposing factions of the Puritans and the Cavaliers are among the most impressive aspects of the opera. The choruses present the dramatic conflict concerning the establishment of Merry Mount which is central to Hawthorne's story. In the opera, this conflict is secondary to the inner turmoil and personal struggle of Bradford. The all-male chorus in Billy Budd is a major dramatic force in the plot. With the exception of a few impressed men, the crew appears content. Melville suggests this surface quality in the crew: "But on board the seventy-four in which Billy now swung his hammock, very little in the manner of the men . . . would have suggested to an ordinary observer that the Great Mutiny was a recent event" (Melville, Billy Budd, pp. 59-60). Possible mutiny is the constant fear of the officers in both the novel and the opera. The hidden unrest among the crew and the everpresent threat of an uprising are conveyed in the opera through the music of the chorus. With the first appearance of the chorus, the men sing the "mutiny" theme (See p. 94). This theme also characterizes the half-complacent, half-threatening character of the Indomitable's crew. Throughout the early portion of scene i, the crew works steadily. The dynamic marking indicate the chorus is never to sing louder than piano.

However, an incident involving a Novice and the Bosun provokes the crew. Both the sudden agitation of the crew and the threat of possible mutiny by it are established through the music. For the first time, the dynamic markings indicate forte. Also, the orchestra gives full melodic support, strengthening the suggestion of the latent mutinous nature of the ship's crew.

CHORUS

0 heave!..... 0 heave a - way, heave, 0 heave! 0

0 heave!..... 0 heave a - way, heave, 0 heave! 0

14

(Britten, p. 25)

The threatening nature of the chorus is developed most fully immediately following Budd's execution. Britten based the response of the chorus at this point in the drama on a descriptive passage in Chapter 27 of Melville's novel. The silence of the scene following Budd's hanging is broken by an incomprehensible sound, originating from the crew assembled on the deck. "Inarticulate" and "dubious in significance," the sound "seemed to indicate some capricious revulsion of thought or feeling . . ." (Melville, p. 126). However, before this disturbance increases, a sudden order of

dismissal is given and the crew disperses. Britten develops the progress of the drama at this point through the full musico-dramatic nature of the chorus. As indicated in the musical score and in the libretto, no words are sung. Instead, a dark vowel "like ur in 'purple' or in the French un" (Britten, p. 322) conveys Melville's "inarticulate" sound. Musically, the threatening responses of the chorus are presented through the use of a fugue, based on the "mutiny" theme. The tempo of the fugal subject, first, sung by the Basses II and Dansker, is presto unlike the slower markings of all previous appearances of this motif. The answer is stated by the Basses I and Donald. The agitation of the crew increases, and before



(Britten. p 322)

the answer can be stated completely, the Tenor I and Tenor II begin a fugal stretto.<sup>11</sup> As the emotional response of the chorus grows, the overlapping of the stretto appears more frequently, creating an increasing excitement. When a smaller ensemble of officers on the quarter-deck dismiss the crew, the musical and the dramatic climaxes are reached simultaneously. The chorus answers the order with a defiant chord.



(Britten, p. 327)

However, as in Melville's version, the crew immediately disperses. This sudden shift in the dramatic character of the chorus from a threatening mob to an obedient crew is presented musically in the orchestra. Both the key signature and the tempo marking change abruptly. Britten has given musico-dramatic life to Melville's narrative description of this scene.

## II Content

One objection critics have against opera is the simplicity and often exaggerated brevity of the libretto. Hugo von Hofmannsthal was appalled to discover "how short is the libretto of Tristan and how long the opera" (The Essence of Opera, p. 9). However, this characteristic brevity has been a demand of composers and an aim of librettists since the beginning of opera. During the creation of his final opera, Turandot, Puccini wrote to his librettist, Giuseppe Adami, concerning the difficult subject of the story and the need for clarity and simplicity: "I know that the subject is not easily convincing but just for this reason you must be more sparing of words and try to make the incidents clear" (The Essence of Opera, p. 287). Verdi strove all his creative life to achieve an aesthetic of simplicity and vigor. He informed his librettist, Arrigo Boito, that "art which lacks spontaneity, naturalness. and simplicity is

no longer art" (The Essence of Opera, p. 243).<sup>12</sup> This simplification of source material is a fundamental principle in the creation of an operatic plot. Debussy's Pelleás et Mélisande, the cardinal example of a play adapted verbatim, offers a notable exception. "The play is enveloped whole into the opera--literally so: there is no separate libretto" (Kerman, p. 172). The original drama served the needs of Debussy without any simplification. However, Maeterlinck's symbolic drama is a highly understated work in which the unspoken overtones play an important role. As such, the original drama conforms "to the dehydrating process that any librettist must to some extent accomplish in his work" (Smith, p. 317).

When a literary writing is adapted as an opera libretto, one loss is almost inevitable. "Ambiguities and variant readings possible in any of the very great works of art . . . must necessarily be omitted or toned down" (Smith, p. 343). Even in the most highly regarded librettos this is true. Boito's Otello focuses upon the central conflicts of the drama's three protagonists. Boito omitted the entire first act of Shakespeare's play, which included the father's curse on Desdemona's marriage to Othello. Henry James's The Turn of the Screw presents insoluble ambiguities. The question of the reality of the ghosts is one of the most obvious. In adapting the plot, this very question presented a major obstacle to the librettist, Myfawny Piper. As discussed earlier, her solution was to make the ghosts "real" by having them sing. The audience also sees and hears them at moments when the Governess is not involved in the action. The librettist's solution eliminates the ambiguous nature of the ghosts, but it does not destroy the central question of the plot: who, if anyone besides the Governess, actually sees Quint and Miss Jessel?

Perhaps the most radical simplification among the librettos studied is the omission of Pearl from both Damrosch's The Scarlet Letter and Carlson's Hester. Certainly one of the most enigmatic characters in literature, Pearl has been variously described as a "drawback rather than an aid," as the "purest type of Spenserian characterization," as "truth and grace," "blessing and burden," and as "pure symbol."<sup>13</sup> Hawthorne refers to Pearl as "an airy sprite," a "little imp," a "fantastic little elf," and a "demon offspring." In the novel's climactic scene, Hawthorne suggests that as a child, Pearl performed a retributive function: "Pearl's errand as a messenger of anguish was all fulfilled" (Hawthorne, p. 181). Most critics have, as Barbara Garlitz has pointed out, "followed Hawthorne and described Pearl as unwittingly performing the part of a Nemesis toward both parents."<sup>14</sup>

Why would both Lathrop and Carlson eliminate such a rich and interesting character? There are instances of children being used in operatic roles. Puccini created roles for children in his operas Madama Butterfly and Suor Angelica. Both, however, are non-singing roles. Britten treated Miles and Flora musically in The Turn of the Screw. He did so, however, on a small, intimate basis: "With children playing key roles, it seemed inevitable that this should be planned as a chamber opera (White, His Life and Operas, p. 180). Britten assigns simple music with a narrow vocal range to both Miles and Flora in the form of familiar nursery tunes, i.e. "Lavender's Blue" and "Tom, Tom the Piper's Son." When Lathrop created his libretto for The Scarlet Letter, Walter Damrosch, his composer, did not have a chamber opera in mind. In the "Introductory Note" to his libretto, Lathrop wrote that Damrosch asked for "a Dramatic



Poem suited for the music of a Grand Opera" (Lathrop, n.p.). The Wagnerian influence in the music was so strong that it prompted Anton Seidl, Damrosch's fellow Wagnerian conductor, to call the opera a "New England Nibelung Trilogy."<sup>15</sup> With such heavy Wagnerian orchestration, a child's singing role would have been out of place. Pearl is quickly dismissed by Lathrop in his opera's first scene when the Reverend John Wilson comments:

A child to thee here was born,  
 Bringing disgrace and scorn.  
 Heaven's wise decree  
 Hath taken thy daughter away  
 Wafted on wings of death. (Lathrop, p. 8)

By eliminating Pearl from his libretto, Lathrop was free to treat "the great elemental story of Hester's and Arthur's love, sin, suffering and partial expiation" (Lathrop, "Introductory Note").<sup>16</sup> The place of Puritan morality<sup>17</sup> in the novel and the importance of the relationships between Pearl and her parents play no part in Lathrop's adapted plot.

In Hester, Carlson also dismissed Pearl with a passing reference. During his prison interview with Hester in Act II, Roger Chillingworth pauses near the child's cradle. Upon seeing the dead infant, he remarks, "Oh, Death, thou art a kind angel" (Carlson, p. 63). No other reference is made to Pearl until the final moments of the opera when, as mentioned in Chapter Two, Pearl appears "as an angel granting heaven's forgiveness" (Carlson, p. 267). Carlson's purpose in using this vision may have been to preserve a portion of Pearl's function as a symbol of blessing. In Hawthorne, a strong bond of human relationships is established between Pearl and her parents, and the unifying love which develops from this bond culminates in honesty and truth. Carlson's theatrical vision fails to provide any such meaning.

The exaggeration and intensification of dramatic events in opera is a result of the simplification of the fictional source material. Writing of opera, Gary Schmidgall states, "exaggeration is part of its essence."<sup>18</sup> Fiction also presents an exaggerated perspective of events. In its creation, the principle of artistic economy also plays a part. The dull, monotonous moments of life are generally passed over in favor of arriving at the more sensational. This artistic principle can produce a texture at once both artistically satisfying and intensified. "Such practices involve the most vigorous selection, and thus clearly throw the true proportion of living into a false perspective" (Mendilow, p. 42). Further, selection of specific events by an adaptive librettist increases this element of exaggeration already present in the source material. As we have seen, the complex moral and political issues discussed and debated by the Drumhead court in Melville's Billy Budd are reduced in Britten's opera to a trio in which each officer allegorically represents a single moral perspective. Such exaggerated simplification in the libretto is precisely what a composer requires in order to set any dramatic situation and intensify the simplified textual presentation. "Music seeks emotions, characters, and situations suitable to amplification" (Schmidgall, p. 11).<sup>19</sup> Such simplified dramatic situations usually possess a latent emotional quality which words alone fail to express. Music can provide the means by which this emotional quality is given full expression. "The fact is, there is a great deal of feeling, highly poetic and highly dramatic which cannot be expressed by mere words . . . but which can be supremely expressed in music."<sup>20</sup> The excess of feeling expressed by Tristan and Isolde is reduced as one point in the libretto to numerous repetitions of "Tristan,

Tristan" and "Isolde, Isolde." However, Wagner's intense musical amplification of these words develops and "sustains the feeling which is the real subject of the drama" (Shaw, p. 262).

A highly charged emotional quality which transcends every other value is the foundation of the content of the operatic plot. Even in such a highly unusual opera as Leos Janacek's Aus Einem Totenhaus, based on Dostoyevsky's Memoirs from a House of the Dead, profound emotions are the basic motivation behind the story. "The opera is unconventional in that there are no female characters, no arias, and no real plot" (Ewen, p. 27). The setting is a Siberian penal labor colony, and the story tells how some of the prisoners came there. These personal accounts of the circumstances which led each individual to the camp present a wide variety of emotional responses.

In most operatic plots, the emotional basis is far simpler. Love is the emotion most predominant in the operatic plot. As Lehman Engel observes, "romance is at the center. Nevertheless, love is at the core" (Engel, p. 21). With the exceptions of Britten's Billy Budd and The Turn of the Screw, romantic love is prominent in the other fourteen librettos. The latent homosexual attraction of Claggart for Billy Budd in Melville's novel is de-emphasized in the libretto. The librettists chose, instead, to portray the spiritual love relation between Budd and Captain Vere, which Vere describes as "the love that passeth understanding" (Forest and Crozier, p. 333). Critics have often pointed out the abnormal relationship between the Governess and her student Miles in James's novel The Turn of The Screw. While there is some hint of this in the opera, the librettist places the greater emphasis on the desire of the

Governess to protect Miles from the very real danger of the ghosts of Quint and Miss Jessel.

Seven of the librettos change the original source materials to allow the inclusion of a love story. Percy MacKaye's Rip Van Winkle makes the most radical change. Rip, a bachelor, falls in love with Peterkee, and with the supernatural intervention of Henrick Hudson and his crew, marries her. In Koanga, Palmyra loves Koanga while in Cable's novel The Grandissimes she loves Honore Grandissime, a creole member of the family. Five of these librettos have love interests added to the plots. The temporary attraction of Lulu and the Stranger in The Jumping Frog of Calaveras County is, however, not central to the story. The romantic interest provides musical variety in a female voice and a momentary diversion from the main story. The idealized love of Philip Nolan and Mary Rutledge in The Man Without a Country, the destructive infatuation between Bannadonna and Una in The Bell Tower, and the passionate, unrequited love of Bradford for Marigold Sandys in Merry Mount, although additions, are central to the plots. The entire story of Act II in J. H. Wainwright's Rip Van Winkle provides a series of melodramatic events which center around Rip's daughter Alice and her relationships with two suitors, the heroic Edward and the villainous Frederick. These events are very tenuously related to Irving's story, which is presented in Acts I and III. The theme of hatred underlying the love interest in Act II of Wainwright's libretto and expressed in Frederick's attempts on the life of Edward, his erstwhile friend and rival in love, is an Italianate influence. While on the surface many librettos of the mid-nineteenth century deal with thwarted love, "in fact the focus of most Italian

librettos is less on love, which is often relegated to one duet and a few expressions by the tenor and the soprano, than on the hatred this love engendered" (Smith, p. 198). The melodramatic events in Act II provided the composer George F. Bristow with some operatic situations of an intensely emotional nature.

In the remaining seven librettos, the love interests remain basically the same as in the original fiction. The suggested love of Katrina Van Tassel in Irving's tale is clearly portrayed in Moore's libretto. The dramatizations of the destructive love relationships in Washington Square, Owen Wingrave, and The Wings of the Dove remain faithful to the fiction of James. Frederick Carlson's adaptations of The Courtship of Miles Standish and The Scarlet Letter retain the love triangles present in both of the original stories. George Parsons Lathrop retained the love-hate relationships among the three principal characters in The Scarlet Letter. However, Hester's suicide in the final act introduces "a purely nineteenth-century idea" (Engel, p. 100), the association of "pain" with "love." This philosophy permeated the art of the period and found its two most popular expressions in the Romantic ideals of triumph through death and of the sacrificing female. These ideals receive their greatest operatic presentations in Wagner's works which, "both musically and librettistically, breathe the nineteenth century" (Smith, p. 269). Wagner's quintessential exposition of these ideals is Isolde's Liebtestod, which she sings over the body of Tristan prior to her own death. Hester's final aria and her subsequent death parallel Isolde's final scene and reveal further Wagnerian influences in this opera.

The temporal structure and the simplified, emotional content of the operatic plot have remained constant. Traditionally, the action is advanced through a series of dramatic segments, set to recitative or one of its variants, which alternate with moments of lyric introspection. Efforts to create a concurrent flow of dramatic and musical development have produced two musico-dramatic techniques: The ensemble and the aria substitute. Successful use of these methods creates simultaneous development of drama and music; however, underneath, the basic alternating temporal structure exists.

# Notes

<sup>1</sup>R. S. Crane. "The Concept of Plot," The Theory of the Novel, ed. Philip Stevick (New York: The Free Press, 1967), p. 141.

<sup>2</sup>Jackson Barry. Dramatic Structure (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1970), p. 70.

<sup>3</sup>This idea has been expressed by various critics, among them Joseph Kerman, Donald Grout, and Charles Hamm. Hamm's statement is characteristic: "Distinction between recitative and aria has been present in opera from its beginnings right up to the present, and the reasons for the distinction are the same in an opera by Mozart as in one by Purcell or Verdi or Britten" (p. 125).

<sup>4</sup>Christoph Martin Wieland. "Essay Concerning German Opera and a Few Related Subjects," in The Essence of Opera, ed. Ulrich Weisstein (New York: W. W. Norton, Inc., 1964), p. 121.

<sup>5</sup>Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians, ed. Eric Blom, (New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1966), 261. Hereafter cited as Grove's.

<sup>6</sup>Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Dictionnaire du musique (1968; rpt. New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1969), p. 345. "L'energie de tous les sentimens, la violence de toutes les passions sont dont l'objet principal du Drama lyrique."

<sup>7</sup>Elaine Brody. Music in Opera: A Historical Anthology (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1970), p. 125.

<sup>8</sup>"Jumpin' Opera," Time, LV (June, 19, 1950), p. 51.

<sup>9</sup>Memoirs of Lorenzo Da Ponte, Trans. Elizabeth Abbott (New York: The Orion Press, 1959), pp. 59-60.

<sup>10</sup>Walter Damrosch. The Man Without a Country (New York: Frederick Rullman, Inc., 1937), p. 7.

<sup>11</sup>A device of musical imitation used in a fugue to allow overlapping entrances of subject and answer. See Grove's, III, 19.

<sup>12</sup>Hector Berlioz. "Preface to the Opera Faust's Damnation," in The Essence of Opera, pp. 210-11. The composer argues that without the artistic freedom to choose famous literary works as subject matter and subsequently to alter them the world "would thus be deprived of Mozart's Don Giovanni, whose libretto is Da Ponte's adaptation of Moliere's Don Juan. Nor would we possess The Marriage of Figaro, whose librettist has hardly respected Beaumarchais's comedy The Barber of Seville . . . or Gluck's Alceste, which is a somewhat crude paraphrase of Euripides' tragedy. The numerous operas based on Shakespeare's plays would have remained unwritten."

<sup>13</sup>Anthony Trollope. "The Genius of Nathaniel Hawthorne," North American Review, CCLXXIV (September, 1979), 203-222. From Trollope's observation that Hester's desolation "would have been more perfect without the child," he would not have objected to the absence of Pearl from the opera libretto. See also F. O. Matthiessen. American Renaissance (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968); Roy R. Male. Hawthorne's Tragic Vision (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1957); Richard Fogle, Hawthorne's Fiction: The Light and the Dark (Norman: The University of Oklahoma Press, 1952).

<sup>14</sup>Barbara Garlitz. "Pearl: 1850-1955," PMLA, LXXII (September, 1957), 693.

<sup>15</sup>Walter Damrosch. My Musical Life (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1923), p. 116.

<sup>16</sup>Hawthorne commented on the idea of his novel as opera: "I saw in American paper yesterday, that an opera, still unfinished, had been written on the story of 'The Scarlet Letter,' and that several scenes of it had been performed successfully in New York. I should think it might possibly succeed as an opera, though it would certainly fail as a play." "Our Home and English Notes," The Complete Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, VIII (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1890), 125.

<sup>17</sup>Ms. Garlitz considers Pearl "an apotheosis of Puritan morality. She is the hypostatization, in miniature of the Puritan conception of nature and the notion of the state. Pearl is a symbol of natural liberty, perverse and willful. She is as unruly as nature and is therefore unfit for civil society. Only when these natural qualities are washed away in Dimmesdale's salvation does Pearl become a responsible human being, ready for admission into the community of men." p. 329.

<sup>18</sup>Gary Schmidgall. Literature as Opera, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 10.

<sup>19</sup>Thomas Hastings, Dissertation on Musical Taste; or, General Principles of Taste Applied to the Art of Music (Albany: Websters and Skinners, 1988), pp. 11-12. Hastings points out, "It is the passions only that can sing." Lehman Engel also observes: "Opera is a hemorrhage of feeling to the exclusion of almost everything else" (p. 59).

<sup>20</sup>George Bernard Shaw. "The Tone Poet," in The Essence of Opera, p. 261.



## CONCLUSION

The librettist as adapter or middleman standing between the original literary source and his new libretto faces contradictory demands: to remain faithful to the original and to organize the material for operatic treatment. A few librettists skirt the dilemma by avowing their intentions to depart deliberately from the source material and to create their own original work. However, in these librettos, e.g. MacKaye's Rip Van Winkle, some hint of the original story remains. Most librettists confront the problem by recreating the original in operatic terms. To prepare fictional materials for the operatic stage requires simplification of the original, a process which precludes total fidelity. In the most faithful adaptations, e.g. Piper's The Turn of the Screw and Elmslie's Washington Square, variant readings, subtleties of characterization, and ambiguities are toned down or, in some instances, omitted. In addition to the simplification of the original, the librettist faces a second restriction upon his attempts at faithful adaptation. He must recreate the material within a structure which permits both dramatic continuity and musical expansion.

The musico-dramatic structure of the opera libretto presents a fundamental movement alternating between dynamic moments of dramatic action and static periods of lyric introspection. This structural dichotomy is inherent in the libretto. Most clearly seen in the classic structures of Gluck and the Romantic forms of Donizetti and the early Verdi, this basic alternating structure exists not only in the continuous operas of Wagner and of the late Verdi but also in the twentieth-century "recitative operas" of Britten and Krenek.

In fiction, narrative and dialogue express the dynamic, on-going moments. Specific actions related in this manner form the fictional 'scene,' reserved for "an important episode or encounter."<sup>1</sup> The reader in these moments experiences a sense of immediacy, for he is learning of the actions as they occur.

The next instant, quick as the flame from a discharged cannon at night his (Billy Budd's) right arm shot out, and Claggart dropped to the deck. . . . A gasp or two and he lay motionless.

"Fated boy," breathed Captain Vere in a tone so low as to be almost a whisper, "what have you done! But here, help me." (Melville, p. 99)

In opera, dynamic sections which advance the story are also presented through actions and dialogue. The librettist must envision the action and provide the stage directions in the libretto. Often these actions will be highly detailed, e.g. pantomime or melodrama, and will be synchronized to the music. Dialogue presented at these moments advances the story and is expressed in recitative or in one of its variant forms.

In fiction, the static sections are the object of description. These moments hold up the forward movement of the story while 1.) background description or summary is presented or 2.) a character's thoughts and feelings are presented directly to the reader through the interior monologue. Such static passages lead "invariably to a sharply defined scene so planned as to advance and resolve a given situation . . . (Edel, The Complete Plays of Henry James, p. 64). For instance, Captain Vere, having just heard Claggart's accusation of Budd as a mutineer, is deeply perplexed as to the best procedure to follow. Finally, he decides to test Claggart by having him repeat the accusation to Budd. This decision of Vere's leads directly to the climactic scene in

Vere's cabin. In opera, similar moments of dramatic inertia also permit characterization. The aria, a major musico-dramatic tool, has two basic functions. First, like the soliloquy in drama and the interior monologue in fiction, the lyrics of the aria reveal a character's inner nature to the audience. In addition, this operatic convention provides a chief means of allowing musical expansion, a basic requirement of operatic dramaturgy. The simplified characterizations necessary in opera librettos are often deepened through effective musical characterization. A second function of the aria further establishes its similarity to the interior monologue: like its literary counterpart, the aria anticipates and, in many instances, "spawns future action" (Engel, p. 179). Claggart's aria both reveals his character and announces his intention to rid his world of Billy Budd through planned future actions.

In addition to strengthening characterization, the music in opera provides the librettist with a dramaturgical method unique to opera: the simultaneous expression by several characters of their individual emotions. Fiction can only suggest the idea of concurrent events and characterizations. The county-fair scene in Flaubert's Madame Bovary offers a well-known example. Spoken drama can present multiple settings and simultaneous actions. However, when several characters attempt to speak at once, e.g. in Eugene Ionesco's The Bald Soprano, the result is chaos. In opera, two ensemble forms provide simultaneity. The "ensemble of perplexity" presents various responses by a group of characters to a particular problem which they face. Each character has a distinctive musical identity which in conjunction with the lyrics he sings expresses

his individual attitude and feelings. The "concerted ensemble," in addition to providing simultaneous characterization, also offers one means of achieving the concurrent presentation of dramatic action and musical development. In this ensemble form, dramatic action, character development, and dialogue are incorporated into a single musical number and unified by it. The numerous ensembles in Karsavina's The Jumping Frog of Calaveras County propel the simple story forward and supply musical interest simultaneously.

The use of American literature as a source material for librettos has, I believe, resulted in a paradox. Of the sixteen librettos studied, those based on materials which appear most compatible to operatic adaptation have resulted in the least successful librettos. The simple story lines, the small number of characters, and the limited number of settings in such fiction as "Rip Van Winkle," The Scarlet Letter, and "The Man Without a Country" have failed to provide satisfactory adaptations. The intimate, personal quality of these stories may not be suitable to the overt, passionate world of opera. In each instance, the librettist added an emotional appeal which did not exist in the original, e.g. the love interests in Rip Van Winkle and The Man Without a Country and Hester's suicide in Lathrop's The Scarlet Letter.

On the other hand, those librettos based on materials which seem least susceptible to simplification have resulted in the most successful adaptations. The numerous characters and settings in The Wings of the Dove, the difficult ambiguities in The Turn of The Screw and the philosophical and moral arguments in Billy Budd were simplified and successfully subsumed into the musico-dramatic structure of the libretto. The

betrayal of human faith and friendship in The Wings of the Dove the overt, highly emotional dramatic situation in The Turn of the Screw, and the mythic conflict of good and evil in Billy Budd are essentially compatible with the dynamic, passionate world of opera.

American literature has proven to be a rich source for operatic treatment. As Earle Johnson's list illustrates, American authors from Irving to Steinbeck continue to provide characters and plots which attract the interests of a number of international librettists and composers. The introspective nature of many of the characters in American literature and the often highly dramatic situations in which they participate offer an appealing challenge to the librettist searching for material suitable for operatic adaptation.

Notes

<sup>1</sup>René Welleck and Austin Warren. Theory of Literature (New York: Brace & World, Inc., 1956), p. 224.

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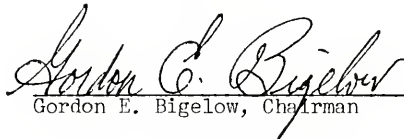
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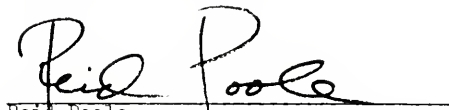
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Ward Hellstrom  
Professor of English

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This dissertation was submitted to the Department of English in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and to the Graduate Council, and was accepted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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